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The World of Malgudi: a Study of the Novels of R. K. Narayan.

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**MUKERJI, Nirmal. THE WORLD OF MALGUDI:
A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF R. K. NARAYAN.**

**Louisiana State University, Ph.D., 1960
Language and Literature, modern**

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THE WORLD OF MALGUDI: A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF R. K. NARAYAN

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of English

by

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M. A., Agra University, 1953

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ABSTRACT

The object of the present study is to analyse and evaluate the achievement of R. K. Narayan as a novelist. A contemporary Indian writer, he has created the South Indian small town of Malgudi as the locale for his fiction. This dissertation analyses and interprets the life portrayed in this town, distinguishes the author's approach to Indian life from that of some prominent Western writers whose works center on the same theme, and evaluates the significance of Narayan's contribution.

Chapter I deals with the setting of Narayan's fictional world. The town of Malgudi is small, old, shabby, and extremely unassuming, but it is real--it is India as seen by one who belongs to it. It is entirely different from the romanticized version of India with which a Western reader is usually familiar. Narayan's setting is appropriate and authentic, and it contributes toward a better and deeper understanding of the life of his people. This strong sense of place with which the Malgudi novels are imbued helps in establishing a feeling of solidity, reality, and intimacy.

In these novels Narayan presents a cross-section of Hindu middle class society. An attempt is made in Chapter II to study these people as they are pictured by the author. The most striking character-

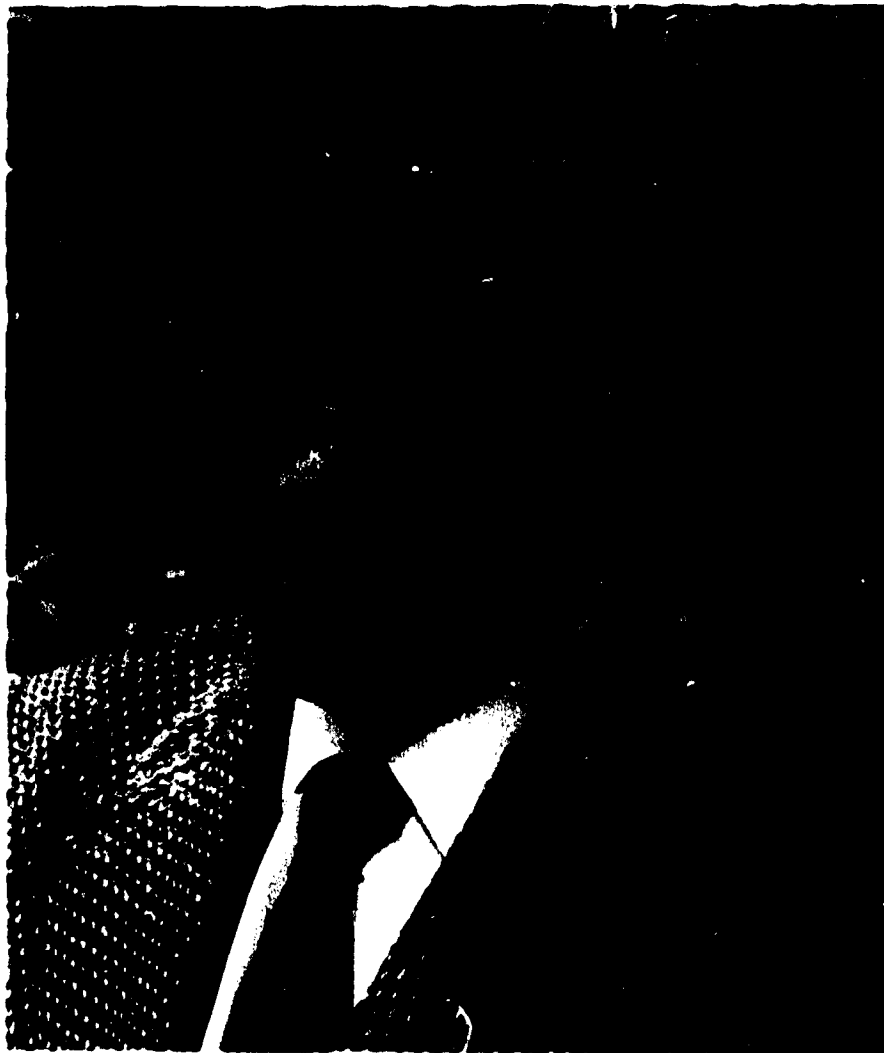
istic about Narayan's people is that they are strongly tied down to deeply rooted traditions, but the impact of Western ideas on them is no less decisive. Ironically enough, they can neither willingly accept nor completely reject the new patterns of life, and this attitude places them in recurrent states of indecision and confusion. Within the general framework of the age-old traditions Narayan studies the lives of such people.

The third chapter traces the development of Narayan's art with particular reference to such problems as structural organization, point of view, and time-sequence. A study of his novels arranged chronologically has revealed his literary development from the chronicle-type of plot structure of Swami and Friends to the well-integrated, dramatic, and organic structure of The Guide. His plots usually rely heavily on central characters. Although English is not Narayan's mother tongue, he writes in it with an ease which is amazing. His prose style is simple, clear, moving, and forceful.

Chapter IV studies the attitudes of the novelist as revealed in his novels. The question of the freedom of the individual is considered in the light of such basic and fundamental concepts of Hindu thought and ways of life as Dharma, Karma, and Varna. It is found that his general attitude toward social and religious institutions is that of trust tempered by criticism. He conceives of life in the spirit of comedy, but it is not the hilarious and boisterous type of comedy; it has undertones of sadness.

His satire is directed more against individuals than institutions. On the whole, it is very gentle. His irony which is his most serviceable weapon has a flavor all his own. He knows well the value of reticence. Nowhere do we find over-explicit and pronounced moral judgments. He does no harm to the illusion of the life he creates. His moral values are implied rather than stated.

The creator of the world of Malgudi is a novelist with a growing reputation. Narayan is rightly considered to be the most significant contemporary novelist of Indo-Anglian literature. For a faithful and intimate portrayal of Indian small town life and for creating a world which is very much alive, he deserves a wider recognition.



Marilyn Silverstone-
Gamma

R. K. NARAYAN
author of
THE GUIDE
(Viking)

PLATE 1

INTRODUCTION

The Western interest in India is as old as the beginnings of the written history of Europe. With the increasing pace of the European overseas expansion and the founding of the English colony in India, there was a quickening in the desire to discover not only its spices, herbs, and precious stones but also its cultural richness. In 1784, twenty-seven years after the historic battle of Plassey, which decided the fate of the vast subcontinent in favor of the English, Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Indeed it was a great step toward opening the door to understanding.

For the literary historian, however, far more important than the founding of this learned society is the sudden and widespread use of Indian themes in English fiction. Bhupal Singh alone refers to more than four hundred such titles in his survey of Anglo-Indian fiction.¹ The mere number in itself, however, is not very important. What is really significant is the fact that the area of cross-cultural contacts

¹A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

has been very extensive. It is true that with an intellectual background and a system of values entirely different from and often diametrically opposed to those which formed the basis of Indian society, the observer from the West remained contented with the outward appearances. He was often dazzled, puzzled, and mystified. Perhaps he had neither the desire nor the capability to analyze and understand the land and the people he had recently conquered. Naturally, the soul of India remained undiscovered.

The introduction of English as the medium of higher education was to a great extent a matter of political necessity. Macaulay's famous "Minute" of 1835 resulted in establishing English in the place the government had designed for it. Such a situation was bound to have many far-reaching effects. The introduction of English gave to the educated Indian an effective medium of expression through which he could reach his fellow countrymen who spoke different languages. Moreover, it was through English that he could make better contacts with the Western world and show that India was something more than a land of elephants and cobras, snake charmers and rope dancers, and strange customs and rituals. The increasing and extensive use of English as the medium of expression resulted in a prolific production of what is usually termed the "Indo-Anglian" literature.² It is true

²Who first coined this term is not known. K. R. Srinivas

that most of these literary efforts are of minor historical interest only. A few like Tagore, Aurbindo Ghosh, Sarojini Naidu, and Mulk Raj Anand have made significant contribution to Indo-Anglian literature. The production of such literature, both good and bad, continues unabated. Very few works, however, have gained national and international recognition. Among these, perhaps the most significant is the contribution of R. K. Narayan who has been widely recognized as the topmost Indo-Anglian novelist of today.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan,³ or R. K. Narayan as he is popularly known, was born on October 10, 1906, in Madras, India. It is there that he completed the early years of his education. Later, he shifted to Mysore where his father was the headmaster of a high school. Narayan received his college education in Maharaja College, Mysore, and graduated from it in 1930. Four years later, in 1934, he was married. The death of his wife in 1939 was a great shock for young

Iyengar in his study, The Indian Contribution to English Literature (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House, 1945), refers to a book entitled Indo-Anglian Literature, which contained "specimen compositions from native students" and which was published in Calcutta in 1883. During the last few decades the term has acquired considerable currency.

³Rasipuram is the name of Narayan's village; Krishnaswami is his father's name; Narayan is his "first" name. In South India the names of the village and the father precede the individual's own name.

Narayan. The upbringing of his only daughter Hema, who was just two years old when her mother died, has given Narayan a purpose in life. Mysore is his permanent home. He lives there with his mother and brothers. His recreations are music and long walks.

Narayan's first book Swami and Friends was published in 1935, and the latest, The Guide, came out in 1958. Besides novels, he has written several hundred short stories and sketches which have been appearing in the Sunday issue of the Hindu of Madras for the last thirty years.

All of Narayan's novels and most of his short stories, too, have an imaginary small town of Malgudi for their locale. It is an old, shabby and peaceful town, and is apparently unruffled by politics. The people who inhabit it are simple, sincere, absurd, and scheming, all in one. They have much in common: their social status, their pride of caste, and their petty quarrels. They are real, real as men and women in actual life are. On the one hand, they have their customs and traditions which they dare not disregard; on the other, the contact with the alien elements has brought such ideas as do not fit into the traditional pattern of social structure, and hence the confusion. It is quite an uncomfortable situation in which his Sampaths and Margayyas find themselves.

Narayan is no modernist; nor does he advocate the turning back

of the wheels of time. He believes in the value of a living tradition, and he refuses to be blown off his feet by the outside winds. Unlike some other contemporary novelists (for example, Mulk Raj Anand), Narayan does not belong to any particular literary or philosophical clique, nor has he introduced any isms into his novels. They are entirely free from political propaganda. This last observation becomes very significant when one studies his novels in the context of the condemnatory tone which is one of the most prominent characteristics of a great number of novels written during the period when the Swaraj Movement was at its height.

In spite of the fact that all of Narayan's novels are written in English and published in England and America and many are even translated into several European languages, no critical work has been done to evaluate his contribution both to English literature and to the Western understanding of India. Narayan's case is no exception; other important Indian writers of English have been equally ignored. This fact brought home to the writer the feeling that a serious, full-length study of Narayan was badly needed. The complete absence of any critical judgments on Narayan or Indo-Anglian fiction in general is a great handicap and, at the same time, evidence of the need for such an investigation. Under the circumstances the whole project was not less than a challenge. As a first study in this particular

field, the present work will have its limitations, but it is hoped that someday it may help those treading a similar path.

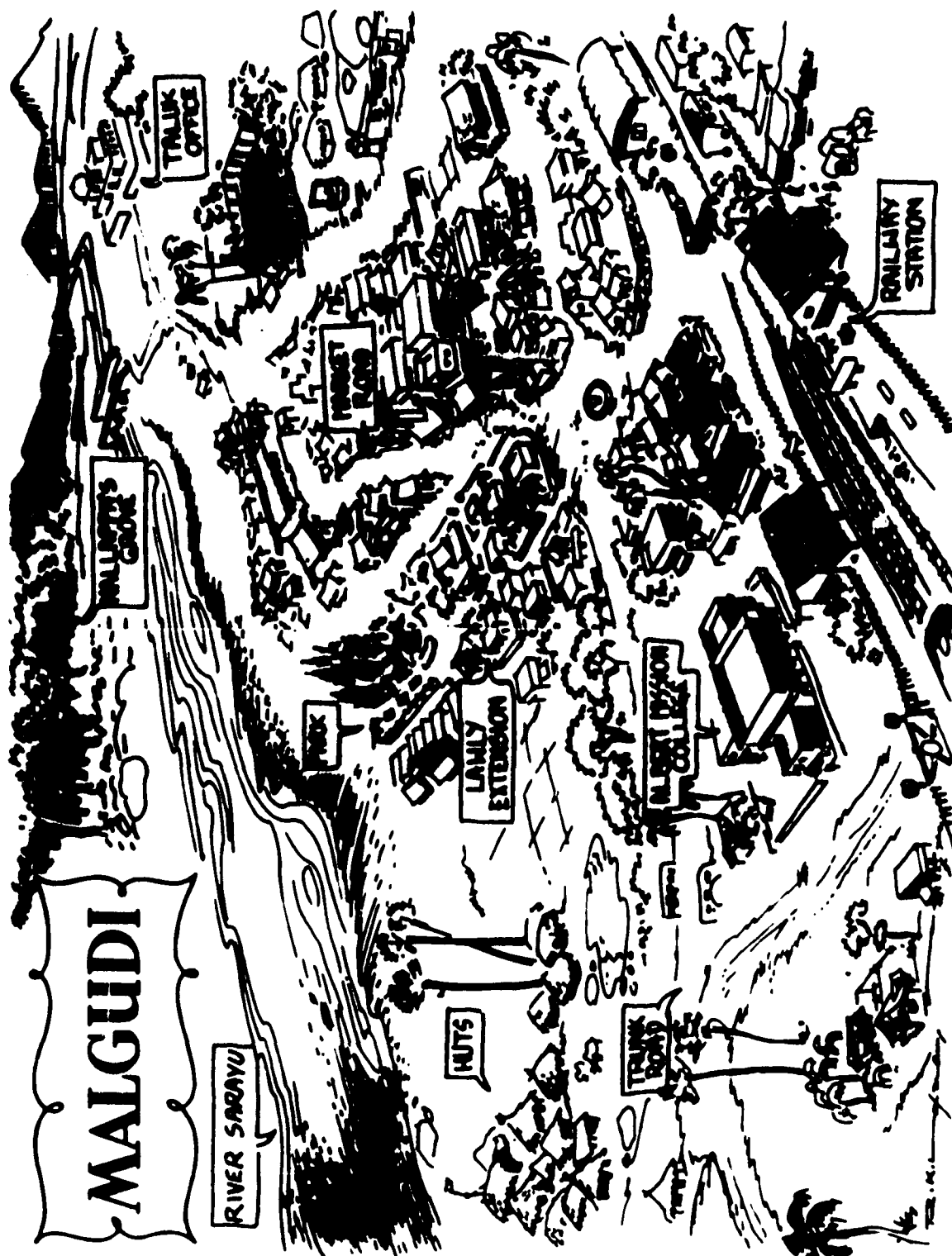


FIGURE 1

CHAPTER I

SETTING

Malgudi, an imaginary small town in South India, is the center of an extremely engaging world created by R. K. Narayan. It is a world in which, in spite of the new ideas encroaching upon it steadily, life goes on leisurely and peacefully, exactly in the same way as it has been going on for centuries. "I might be in the twentieth century B.C. for all it matters, or 4000 B.C., "¹ says Srinivas, the editor of The Banner and the script-writer of the film "The Burning of Kama." And yet the Albert Mission College headed by principal Brown, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with its imposing structure, the newly built bungalows in the Lawley Extension (named after Sir Frederick Lawley, who was once the Superintending Engineer for Malgudi Circle), the Engladia Banking Corporation managed by Edward Schilling, "a compound of beef and whisky,"² all this is enough to shatter the

¹ R. K. Narayan, The Printer of Malgudi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957), p. 258. The occasion is a strange ceremony in which the exorcist with the help of a cane smeared with saffron and vermillion is trying to dispossess the insane Ravi of the "spirit" which, they think, has possessed the poor boy.

²Ibid., p. 17.

illusion of timelessness in Malgudi. The world has moved on and has left a definite, although at times imperceptible, impression on this fascinating small town.

With the ancient river Sarayu, whose birth is ascribed to the scratching of a line on the sand with an arrow by Sri Ram Chandra³, the incarnation of God Vishnu (for so the people of Malgudi believe), on one end, and the westernised Lawley Extension area on the other, Malgudi seems to be a curious mixture of the traditionalist East and the ever-changing West. Like the rest of India it is in a state of slow transition. It is changing, no doubt, but, unwillingly. It can neither reject nor accept the modern ideas. It cannot readily break with the age-old traditions. Marriages are still arranged by the parents of the girl and the boy. Horoscopes are compared, and unless these agree perfectly (the planets are very tricky!), no further step can be taken in the negotiations. But when boys like Chandran, the product of Albert

³Sri Ram Chandra is the hero of the ancient epic Ramayana--the sacred book of the Hindus. Ram was born in Ayodhya, a big city on the banks of river Sarayu, in Uttar Pradesh. On the day when he was going to be the crowned king of his land, he was ordered by his step-mother, Kakai, to go in exile for fourteen years. Accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshman he traveled all over the country. One day in his absence Sita was kidnaped by the demon king Ravan of Lanka (Ceylon). Ram organized a big army, built a bridge over the sea between the two countries, defeated Ravan, and brought Sita back home. Legends associating Ram's name with innumerable places, cities, rivers, jungles and hills have grown up. The legend of Malgudi's Sarayu is one of these.

Mission College, insist on marrying the girls of their own choice, their parents threaten to disown them. To push away a tumbler of milk is to insult Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. In order to fix an auspicious moment for the opening ceremony of The Sunrise Pictures a regular conference of the local priests is called. In this ceremony (which is as elaborate as a Hindu marriage ceremony) the camera, which had cost the producers of the film company forty thousand rupees, is decorated by jasmine flowers and a big dot of sacred sandalwood paste. "It is just as well," remarks Srinivas, "they are initiating a new religion and that camera decked with flowers is their new God who must be propitiated."⁴

It is this Malgudi, the Malgudi of Sampath and Margayya, Swami and Rajan, Chandran and Krishna, which is at the center of the fictional world created by Narayan. It is something more than a mere background. It is alive, real, and warm. The streets and lanes appear to be very familiar, as familiar as one's own hometown. This sense of intimacy helps in creating a deeper and better understanding of its people, and establishes a strange fellowship. This is what Mahatma Gandhi (Waiting for the Mahatma) has to say: "Your town is very beautiful.... God is everywhere, and if you want to feel his presence you will see him in a place like this with a beautiful river flowing, the

⁴Narayan, op. cit., p. 164.

sunrise with all its colors, and the air so fresh."⁵

But this is not the complete picture of Malgudi. Unfortunately, there is another side to it, a very dark side. One has only to go to the area beyond Nallappa Grove, the place where the untouchables live:

It was probably the worst area in the town; it was an exaggeration to call them huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and coconut-matting, all crowded in anyhow, with scratchy fowl cracking about, and children growing in the street dust; the municipal services were neither extended here nor missed although the people living in the hovels were employed by the municipality for scavenging work in the town.⁶

This area, however, is beyond the so-called city limits. In this respect there is nothing peculiar about Malgudi. It is the traditional settlement pattern of an average Indian town. Belonging to the class called "Untouchables," the only place where these people can possibly live has to be some secluded spot away from the town so that there may not be any danger of their polluting the rest of the townsfolk.

The most distinguishing feature of the landscape of Malgudi is the river Sarayu itself. It is, as a matter of fact, the pride of Malgudi. It is only ten minutes walk from Ellaman Street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by the oilmongers. Every morning and evening its sand-banks are crowded with all kinds of people. On special

⁵R. K. Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955), p. 61.

⁶Ibid., p. 32.

occasions, whether it is a religious festival or some other auspicious day, it is almost another sight. Walking upto the river to take a bath and then perform the pujā is a part of the daily routine of many Malgudians. When a distinguished person visits the city, comments Narayan, the Municipal President usually takes him to the top of the Town Hall and proudly points to him Sarayu in moon-light, glistening like a silver belt across the north.

It is interesting to note the significance of the river in the cultural life of the town. For the elderly citizens of Malgudi there is nothing more gratifying than a bath in the river before sunrise followed by offering water to Surya Devtā (Sun God), the symbol of Agni, the sustainer of life. The younger generation, the generation of Krishna and Chandran, does not seem to be very much interested in any such activity. A leisurely stroll in the company of "gay" friends discussing the news of the College, the discussion often interrupted by the side-glances thrown at some beautiful girl with jasmine flowers in the hair and a timid expression on the face passing is their idea of Sarayu. It is here on the bank of Sarayu that Mani, the big bully (Swami and Friends), waits for Rajam and plans to bundle him up and throw him into the river. It is here on the bank of Sarayu that Chandran steals a glance of his beloved Malathi who almost drives him mad (The Bachelor of Arts). It is here that Sampath confides in Srinivas the sensational story of his

flight with Shanti to Mempi Hills (The Printer of Malgudi).

Another significant feature of the settlement pattern of the town is the Market Road. It is the life-line of Malgudi; "...but it had a tendency to take abrupt turns and disrupt itself into side-streets, which wove a network of crazy lanes behind the facade of buildings on the main road."⁷ It is only a man like Margayya (The Financial Expert) with a shrewd sense of business who can appreciate the "beauty" of the Market Road. Krishna (Grateful to Life and Death) would have felt suffocated by such an oppressive atmosphere; but Margayya is made of another stuff;

The Malgudi gutter ran below his shop with a mild rumble, and not so mild a smell. But Margayya either did not notice it, or did not mind, being used to it in his own home. Margayya's blood was completely the city man's and revelled in crowds, noise and bustle; the moment he looked and saw the stream of people and traffic flowing up and down the road, he felt that he was in the right place. A poet would perhaps have felt exasperated by the continuous din, but to Margayya it was like a background music to his own thoughts.⁸

Margayya is simply enchanted by the prospect of securing a shop on such a strategic spot in the Market Road. Next to his shop are insurance agencies, hair-cutting saloons, some film distributors, a lawyer's chamber and a hardware shop--and hundreds of people going there everyday. This is all that Margayya needs for the kind of business he

⁷ Narayan, The Printer of Malgudi, p. 3.

⁸ The Financial Expert (London: Methuen and Co., 1952), p. 133.

is going to start.

Leaving Margayya in his Market Road shop we could visit the residential area of the city. Away from the Market Road, on one end of the town is the Lawley Extension and the New Extension. The elite of the city, the government officials, professors, doctors, lawyers, all live there in stylish houses with lawns and gardens, garages and outhouses. Rajam's father (Swami and Friends), who is the Superintendent of Police; Chandran's father (The Bachelor of Arts), who is an advocate; Natesh (Waiting for the Mahatma), who is the Municipal Commissioner--all live in this aristocratic Lawley Extension. Natesh's palatial house "Neel Bagh" has cost him more than two lakhs and twenty-five thousand rupees. His anxiety to entertain Mahatma and his party in his house and thus, "make an impression" on Malgudi is natural. Yet this is not the whole story. Sampath, the printer of Malgudi, and the versatile genius, Dr. Pal, the "journalist, correspondent and author,"⁹ also live in the Lawley Extension but only in the outhouses.

The Sarayu Street area is new but very modest in dimensions. The houses are neat, comfortable, but not like those in the Lawley Extension. Krishna, the hero of Grateful to Life and Death, with his

⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

pretty wife Sushila and daughter Leela live in this Sarayu Street.

The second residential area is in the very heart of the city, in that crazy net-work of lanes and by-lanes which merge mysteriously into the Market Road. Kabir Street is one such. The Truth Printing Works owned by Sampath is in this very street. Anderson Lane, where editor Srinivas lives, and the Vinayak Mudali Street with the big gutter flowing close by (into which Balu had thrown the red account book of his father) also belong to the same neighborhood. This is the heart of Malgudi; houses dingy and dark, with a small pyol which serves many purposes--a living room in the daytime and a bed room on the summer nights.

It is, however, not just the streets, the lanes, and the river, but the people, people like Margayya, Sampath, Jagdish, and Somu who make this little world of Malgudi extremely interesting and life-like. When we think of Malgudi, its topography, its streets, its hair-cutting saloons, its Anand Bhawan Restaurant, we are, as a matter of fact, thinking of its people. The skill with which Narayan blends the physical setting with the human factor is admirable. Outwardly, it seems to be something very simple. It is simple, but it requires a disciplined artist like Narayan to achieve this effect of simplicity. The total impression of such an imperceptible blending is of a sense of wholeness which gives meaning to the very idea of existence.

Anthony West's following comment on the role of the background of Malgudi is significant: "The setting is the principal character, and the smells, sights, sounds, and even the flavors that are all part of the experience of being in Malgudi are conveyed with an ever extraordinary vividness."¹⁰ What he says about Grateful to Life and Death is equally true of almost all the other Malgudi novels.

The people who inhabit this imaginary township are simple, naive and true to life. The pattern of their life itself makes a significant contribution to the total background. Malgudi without its financial expert Margayya, its printer Sampath, its editor Srinivas, its holy man Raju, its journalist--author--sociologist Dr. Pal, and its dandy Sriram could hardly be the Malgudi of Narayan, the place we know so well.

There is Margayya, with a grey discolored tin box under the shade of the big banyan tree, explaining to the ignorant villagers how to take more and more loans from the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank and from each other, too. There is Dr. Pal, the author of the manuscript first called Bed Life or The Science of Marital Happiness but afterwards, through the caution of the printer, changed to Domestic Harmony, always busy with a new scheme. There is Srinivas, the editor of The Banner, waging war against the existing evils of Malgudi. And,

¹⁰ The New Yorker, Oct. 31, 1953. pp. 126-27.

dominating all is the fascinating figure of Sampath, who is printer, director, producer, and actor--all in one. In a direct contrast to the scheming world of the adults, we have another world, the world of innocence, of childhood: Sumati and Kamia snubbed by their disciplinarian father (The Dark Room), Swaminathan oppressed by the earnestness with which everyone is trying to make him a scholar. In the center of this confused world stands the Albert Mission College, a powerful symbol of the Western impact, breathing a different air. It is here that Chandran, the hero of The Bachelor of Arts, graduates, and Krishna, the principal character in Grateful to Life and Death, delivers notes on Milton and Carlyle, Hardy and Shakespeare.

Another factor which makes Maigudi what it is, a slow-moving peaceful town unruffled by the outside world, is the extremely unassuming and easy pattern of the life of its people. Life in Maigudi, by all means, is easy. Swami's father and many like him, after their morning meal of rice and sāmbhar, chew betel leaves, go to their offices leisurely, either walking or in old-fashioned jutkās (horse-driven carriages). Women get up early in the morning, take their bath, do pujā for a while, and then cook very spicy curry and rice. When their husbands and children leave the house at about ten, they clean the house, feed the little ones, and then go to their neighbors for a "little" chit-chat which inevitably turns out to be only a preamble for "high-level discussions." This goes on

uninterrupted till about three when it is time to hurry back and cook ~~something~~ for the husbands and children coming from offices and schools. Sometimes they may read a few pages of a short story or a novel (Srinivas's wife often did that), or knit sweaters for their husbands which they usually do not get to finish. This feminine world is extremely limited. It has very little concern for what happens outside. Marriages, the dowry that a particular bride brings, the dresses and jewelry that their mothers once had, and similar issues are infinite sources of endless talking. The parental control of children is rather strict.

This is the background of the life which is pictured in the novels of Malgudi. It has a strange evenness of its own--perhaps, to an outsider, it looks rather too even; but when scrutinized closely, the background becomes more meaningful, the distinctions more prominent, and the figures moving in the foreground throbbing with life. There is no mystery hanging over their lives. They are common people with not very uncommon problems. Most of them, with a few exceptions like Natesh, the Municipal Commissioner, and Somu Sundram, the producer of the film company, belong to a class usually termed the middle class. It is obvious that the boundaries of this class are, particularly in a country like India, extremely difficult to establish. The social position of a person very often depends on factors other than money. For example, the factor of the caste of a family determines the social position of the

individual to a very large extent. Respect for the older values, though this life in general has not been entirely untouched by the new patterns, is a marked characteristic of the Malgudian way of life. Narayan is very successful in showing this contrast between the framework of old traditions and the new ways of thought and life brought in by the West.

This change, although slow, has exerted tremendous influence on the social structure of the life as portrayed in these novels. The institution of joint-family system is a good example. It is the most significant feature of the traditional Hindu family set-up. Although a change in the economy of the country has almost uprooted this age-old institution, it has not entirely died out. It still survives in millions of Indian villages. In the towns, particularly among professional people, it is a different story. Taya Zinkin's comment on this situation is significant:

Much of India is too poor for the joint family to survive; for if there is nothing to share, there is no bond. Landless laborers who often move from place to place have no joint family. The peasant with a couple of acres soon finds that his son either moves into another hut or sets up his own kitchen in a corner of the compound.... Nonetheless, the joint family has strong roots among Brahmins, merchants, and the richer peasants.¹¹

In the consideration of the Malgudi novels this phenomenon of

¹¹ Taya Zinkin, India Changes! (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 59.

the gradual break-up of the joint family system has great significance because of the change that it has caused in the general background of life, particularly in creating a shift in the social and cultural values. How different would have been the story of the financial expert had his father been alive and the whole family had continued living in the way they had been doing before! Margayya's father once had a big house, and he was considered fairly well-to-do. But when the story begins, we are presented with another picture. The father has died, and the family is broken:

After the death of the old man the brothers fell out, their wives fell out, and their children fell out. They could not tolerate the idea of even breathing the same air or being enclosed by the same walls. They got involved in litigation and partitioned everything that their father had left. Everything that could be cut in two with an axe or scissors or a knife was divided between them, and the other things were catalogued, numbered and then shared out.¹²

One thing, however, which they could neither cut nor number was the well of the house. It remained common--a very convenient place to pass remarks or to see what is happening in the other house!

The case of Srinivas's family is entirely different. His elder brother had been supporting the entire family, including Srinivas's, without any distinction since the death of their father. Theirs was a

¹² The Financial Expert, pp. 9-10.

rich family; their father had been an advocate and had had a grand practice. He had also acquired extensive property in the neighborhood. "Their family tradition," says Narayan, "was that they should graduate at Malgudi in the Albert Mission College, spend two years in Madras for higher studies in law and then return each to his own room in their ancient sprawling house."¹³ And they did return to their rooms and studied Upanishads! It is only when Srinivas is thirty-seven that he starts for Malgudi to make an independent living.

Such is the background out of which Narayan creates his Sampaths and Chandrans, Srirams and Krishnas. He deals with life as it is lived in Malgudi, whether in Market Road or Anderson Lane. His novels are, however, by no means mere sociological studies. He deals with the social problems which his characters would and could possibly face. There are problems of caste, arranged marriages, family relationships, adjustment of the individual to his environment. What is remarkable about Narayan is the fact that he deals with these problems without making us aware that he is doing so. We do not stop reading the story and start thinking of the problems and the ways to solve these. We do feel so when we read, for example, The Big Heart¹⁴ or The Sword and the Sickle of Mulk Raj Anand, another major contemporary Indo-Anglian

¹³The Printer of Malgudi, p. 10.

novelist. The general background of their novels is not very dissimilar from each other. Anand writes about the life of the poor or the low middle class people of Panjab and the Western Frontier Province. But there is a world of difference between the point of view of the two novelists and the use they make of their settings. Narayan is not a social pathologist. He is not making any theoretical system out of the human material available to him. His Sampaths and Margayyas interest him not for being symbols of social exploitation but because they are interesting, laughable, real human beings. This approach to characterization definitely influences the setting of his fictional world.

Narayan is, first and last, an artist who is engaged in portraying delightfully true pictures of life in India. The joys and sorrows, the warmth of human relationships, the hypocrisy and selfishness of human beings--all these go to make the Malgudi world a real place. Narayan is not interested in piling up details for their own sake, nor does he suffer from the passion of being always precise and accurate. His novels are not topographical guides. He does not start from one end of the town giving accurate description of each locality, road and building, and then end with the other side. It is through little offhand details thrown

¹⁴ The Big Heart deals with the life of the coppersmith community of Amritsar, Panjab. The Sword and the Sickle shows the disintegration of a village. The principal character is a Sikh peasant who had fought in World War I in France.

in here and there that he creates the illusion of the reality of his setting.

We feel it; we see it; and we know it to be true. The following little passage has not much significance in itself:

In the ill-ventilated dark passage between the front hall and the dining-room, Swaminathan's grandmother lived with all her belongings, which consisted of an elaborate bed made of five carpets, three bed sheets, and five pillows, a square box made of jute fibre, and a small wooden box containing copper coins, cardamoms, cloves and areca-nuts.¹⁵

In this single sentence enumerating the personal belongings of the old granny, Narayan does much more than it may apparently seem to be. He creates setting: the front hall connected with the dining-room by a dark passage. He creates the atmosphere of a typical South Indian, middle class home. This atmosphere even smells of cardamoms and cloves. And above all, Narayan creates granny in her elaborate setting. We can see her in an old-fashioned, faded Banglore saree, stroking Swami's hair and telling him all the make-believe stories about his grandfather, and then eventually rambling on to the story of the truth-speaking Harishchandra,¹⁶ a legendary figure whose memory is still cherished in every Indian home.

¹⁵ Swami and Friends, p. 21.

¹⁶ Swami and Friends, p. 23. Harishchandra was an ancient Hindu king who had never spoken a lie in all his life. His fame had spread even in the darbār (court) of the god Indira, in Heaven. Shani (Saturn), however, did not like it. He told the gods that he wanted to try Harishchandra and see if he really was true to his words. One day

The way that Narayan presents the whole scene seems to be deceptively artless. Before we realise the technical devices by means of which he is able to evoke a particular setting or atmosphere, we find ourselves participating in the very drama of human emotions itself. There are, however, situations which we neither accept nor reject. For example, we do not willingly approve or disapprove of the circumstances under which Margayya rises, but we do feel a strange sense of communion. When the super-structure of wealth that he had recently raised crumbles, we "feel an almost personal sense of distress."¹⁷

This nearness to characters, the sense of sharing their joys and sorrows, dreams and ambitions, brings us closer to the physical world they inhabit. The Vinayaka Mudali Street no more remains a dirty old street; it becomes the center of the life that the hero finds himself in. Every morning we leave No. 14 D Vinayaka Mudali Street with Margayya who carries a grey, discolored, tin box, which has everything he needs

Shani came to the kingdom of Harishchandra in the disguise of a brahmin. He asked the king to promise to give him one thing. When the king had made his promise, Shani asked for the whole of the kingdom, including the royal treasure. Harishchandra accompanied by his wife and child was forced to leave his kingdom and go somewhere else to seek a living. He tried very hard to get a job, and the only job he could get was that of an assistant to a chandāl, the person in charge of a cremation ground. Shani was still not appeased. A few days later, he became a snake and bit Harishchandra's child, who died instantly. The mother took the dead body of the child to the cremation ground. As she did not have any cloth to wrap the body, she tore half of her sāree to wrap it in. When she asked Harishchandra to let her cremate it, she was refused because she did not have the money to pay the dues of the chāndal. The gods,

for his "office," under his arm, and spend the day under the shade of the big banyan tree while the financial wizard advises (rather persuades) Mollana of Koppal and Kanda and many others how to secure more and more loans from the Co-operative Bank established for encouraging thrift. Every evening when "the sun hits him on the nape of his neck"¹⁸ and he pulls down the lid of his box, thus, "closing his office" for the day, we come back to the dingy, dark Vinayaka Street, and almost hear Margayya's son shouting "Appā"!¹⁹

Sometimes Narayan creates a deliberate contrast between different settings involving the same character. Such a contrast often helps in understanding different facets of the personality of the character or characters concerned. The tragic irony inherent in such a situation creates a strange sense of loneliness. The Printer of Malgudi offers a very good illustration of such a contrast.

Sampath in his office, a small room partitioned by a printed curtain with a purple lion attacking a spotted deer on it, talking to Somu Sundram is different from Sampath with his five sickly children

including Shani, were so moved by this scene that they gave him everything back, his kingdom, his treasure, and his child.

¹⁷The New Yorker, April 25, 1953, p. 129.

¹⁸The Financial Expert, p. 8.

¹⁹Appā in Tamil means "papa."

living in an outhouse (originally built for menial servants) of Lawley Extension. In his office among his staff (whose exact number was a top secret; a liberal guess would be just one person--the "boy"), he is the master, a dominating figure knowing perfectly well how to deal with his customers. "You will get the proofs positively this evening, and tomorrow you may come for the finished copies. Sorry for the delay. My staff is somewhat overworked at the moment. They have the instruction to give you the maximum cooperation."²⁰ These words are typical of the usual remarks that he repeats many times a day. At the appointed hour, of course, nobody can find him. This picture of Sampath, a man of great tact, confidence, pride, independence, firmness, and amiability, does not fit into the other one, Sampath at home. This is how Narayan describes the humble surroundings of the latter Sampath:

He [Sampath] led him [Srinivas] along a sidewalk to the back-yard. On the edge of the compound there was an outhouse with a gabled front, a veranda screened with bamboo-trellis, and two rooms. It was the printer's house. Srinivas felt rather disappointed at seeing him in his setting now, having always imagined that he lived in great style. The printer hurriedly cleared the veranda for his visitor; he rolled up a mat in great haste, kicked a roll of bedding out of sight, told some children playing there: 'Get in! Get in!' and dragged a chair hither and thither for Srinivas and a stool for himself. Srinivas noted a

²⁰The Printer of Malgudi, p. 21.

small table at the further end littered with children's books and slates; a large portrait hung on the wall of a man with side whiskers, wearing a tattered felt hat, with a long pipe sticking out of a corner of his mouth.²¹

Or, again, when Srinivas is entertained by a dance performance given by the children under the direction of Sampath:

Srinivas was somehow a little saddened by the performance; there was something pathetic in the attempt to do anything in this drab, ill-fitting background. He felt tears very nearly coming to his eyes....Srinivas felt an oppression in his chest, and began to wish that the performance would stop; the printer pumping the harmonium on his lap, the bundles of unwashed clothes pushed into a corner, and the children themselves clad uniformly in some cheap grey skirt and shirts and looking none too bright--it all seemed too sad for words.²²

And it is true, it is too sad for words.

From Sampath's Truth Printing Works of Kabir Lane to the spacious and airy buildings of the Albert Mission College--the entire picture is changed. We no more hear the groans of the treadle of the printing press owned by Sampath. Instead, the occasional shrieks of the college bell signal Gajapathy to make an honorable retreat to the staff room! It is an altogether different world--debates, lectures, classes attended, classes missed, criticism of teachers, Principal Brown's account of his Oxford days, and then at the end of the year

²¹Ibid., p. 103.

²²Ibid., p. 107.

final examinations.

One thing that strikes the readers most is the ease with which the novelist creates the world of Brown and Gajapathy, Krishna and Chandran. Three of his novels and several short stories use this common setting. One often feels as if Narayan is drawing upon his own experiences of life. This may be true to some extent. After graduating from Maharaja College, Mysore, in 1930, Narayan taught (like Krishna of Grateful to Life and Death) in a college for several years. In addition to this he had many other contacts with the profession of teaching. His father was headmaster of a high school in Mysore for several years. It is quite possible that in this trilogy (Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, and Grateful to Life and Death) he is writing about the people and the situations that he knew in his real life. However, it would be wrong to interpret these novels as autobiographical. The use of the felt and experienced reality in creating this imaginary world gives it a strange sense of solidity and intimacy. The only novel which could be termed "autobiographical" (and then only in part) is Grateful to Life and Death.²³

The lack of interest in the institutions for the education of girls in the Malgudi novels is not very surprising. The only mention

²³ Personal letter, dated Dec. 16, 1959, to the writer.

made is of the school in which the granddaughter of Srinivas's landlord studies. It is just a casual remark. Since the old man is not on speaking terms with his daughter and son-in-law but loves his grandchild and wants to see her, the only possible meeting place is the school. All that we know about it is that it is a Methodist school. We see it only from the outside; we do not go in.

The attitude of general indifference toward women's education needs very little explanation when one remembers that the novelist is writing about a society in which girls are married at fourteen. An unmarried girl above this age is supposed to be a disgrace for the family concerned. In The Bachelor of Arts when Chandran's mother is told that the girl his son wants to marry is getting on toward sixteen, she screams "Sixteen! They can't be all right if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty ages ago. They can't be all right. We have a face to keep in this town."²⁴ The only two exceptions are Rosie (The Guide) and Shanti (The Printer of Malgudi). Rosie is a devadāsi, a low-caste professional temple dancer. Shanti is a budding film star. Both of these women, however, do not belong to Malgudi. They are outsiders and do not fit into the background of Malgudi. They thrust themselves in only to destroy the

²⁴The Bachelor of Arts (East Lansing: The Michigan State College Press, 1954), p. 69.

peace of the town.

The general pattern of life as lived in Malgudi gives a strange old-time air to the background of this fictional world. It seems almost untouched by the new ideas and values. Consequently, the slightest departure from the socially accepted customs and practices is too conspicuous for Malgudi. Young boys go to Albert Mission School and then to the college, marry the girls their parents select for them, take up a job in Malgudi, and settle down with their parents. Nothing very sensational happens. It is this daily routine of life itself that matters. The little details, whether about Krishna's wife Sushila or Sriram's old granny, are never uninteresting.

Almost all the novels except the last part of Waiting for the Mahatma, when the whole scene is shifted to New Delhi, are set in Malgudi. It is interesting how Narayan's people feel about their little town and how different they appear when they temporarily move to a bigger world, say, Madras or Delhi. There is nothing very strange about the feeling of pride that they have for their small town. It is very natural. People all over the world feel the same way. Their town is the best; there is nothing to match it on the face of the earth.

The world of Malgudi is very small. Here everybody knows almost everybody else. Life is simple, easy-going. But when they move out of this small and intimate world, they almost get lost. This is how Chandran feels when he is in Madras. He wishes:

...the people of Madras were more human; they were so mechanical and impersonal; the porter at the station had behaved as if he were blind, deaf, and mute; now this hotel man would not even look at his guest; these fellows simply did not care what happened to you after they had received your money....Chandran had a feeling of being neglected.²⁵

Similarly, when Sriram goes to New Delhi to join Bharati (Waiting for the Mahatma), he feels very much out of place. It is almost a new land for him. People speak different languages, dress differently and eat differently. Sriram of Malgudi is completely bewildered in New Delhi with its "strange surroundings, the strange avenues and buildings, the too broad roads, the exotic men and women...."²⁶

But the proximity of Bharati gives him a sense of homeliness, and he feels as if he were back in Malgudi. It is not just the question of strange surroundings, the very way of life is different. In New Delhi Sriram of Malgudi cannot get the food to which he is accustomed. Bharati's advice "to learn to eat chappātti, and vegetable and curd and fruit and not ask for rice or sāmbhar"²⁷ is of very little help to Sriram. He still longs for pungent South Indian food. It is very natural for one to feel like that when placed in an alien atmosphere. Even back in

²⁵Ibid., p. 95.

²⁶Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 225.

²⁷Ibid., p. 228.

Malgudi there stands a wall between those who are of Malgudi and those who come from the North. In The Financial Expert Margayya hesitates before he accepts the hospitality of Madan Lal, the owner of the Gordon Printery. When invited for lunch, he feels worried: "This man from the North--God knew what he ate at home: perhaps beef and pork and strange spices. How could he go and sit with him"?²⁸ And, that is a big question!

Most of Narayan's novels are set in pre-independence India. Although Narayan does not seem to be particularly interested in the big issues of the day (at least, he does not make these the major problems of his novels), life in Malgudi, in general, is not completely free from political pressure. What happens in the rest of the country is sure to have some influence on this small corner of the world. In Swami and Friends we are told that on August 15, 1930, two thousand citizens of Malgudi assembled on the right bank of Sarayu to protest against the arrest of Gauri Shankar, a prominent political worker of Bombay. The meeting ended in a big procession which went around the town and created a great stir. There is, however, nothing very peculiar about this protest meeting. It was the part of the pattern which was repeated every now and then all over the country. The people wanted

²⁸The Financial Expert, p. 96.

independence, and they fought with the weapons of Satyagraha (non-cooperation). The Swadeshi Movement, which was started to ban foreign goods and encourage Indian industries, was an essential part of the larger program for independence. Bonfires of foreign clothes were not very uncommon. One such is mentioned in Swami and Friends. It cost poor Swami the only cap he had. His "whole-hearted co-operation" in breaking the window panes of his school brought him his dismissal.

This was India in the thirties. In Waiting for the Mahatma we get another aspect of the political setting. The story starts somewhere around 1940 and ends with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948. The highlights of this period are the "Quit India Movement" of 1942 and the achievement of political independence in 1947. The situation becomes more tense because of India's participation in the Second World War. The formation of the Indian National Army under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose in Japan makes the political situation still more complex. Jagdish, the photographer in Waiting for the Mahatma, and Sriram too for some time, are the followers of Subhash Chandra Bose. They burn railway stations, cut telephone lines, and make bombs. In Sriram's life, however, this proves to be a transitory phase. With the release of Bharati from jail, he again becomes a follower of Mahatma Gandhi.

It is just not enough to say that in some of his novels Narayan brings in current political problems and their implications. What is still more significant is the use that he makes of these issues in his fictional world. When one compares the setting and the atmosphere of hundreds of novels and short stories written between 1920 and 1945, in all the Indian languages as well as in English, condemning the British raj with the atmosphere and the handling of the same theme, one is greatly struck by the difference. Most of these so-called "political" novels could better be called "tracts." To a student of the social and political history of India of that period these may be of great interest. As works of art, only a few rise above the level of mediocrity. A strong note of condemnation, which is common to almost all of these "political" novels, spoils the artistic balance. Moreover, most of these are highly topical, they stand the risk of being "outdated." The novels like Just Flesh, There Lay the City, and We Never Die of D. F. Karaka, which were great hits of the forties, are almost outdated today. Even K. L. Gauba's Uncle Sham (a reply to Catherine Mayo's Mother India), which had created a great sensation in its time, is an half-forgotten book today.

Narayan is strikingly different from most of these writers. He is extremely urbane in his treatment of political themes. Even when we know on which side his sympathies are, we do not feel as

if we have been led to one particular point of view. Narayan is too subtle an artist to use the tone of out-right condemnation. He has that discipline which is the first requirement of every great artist. When he brings current politics into his novels, he does not do so for defending one system or the other. He does so simply because he cannot eliminate the tremendous influence that these political events exert on the lives of his people in Malgudi. For example, the details about the protest meeting and the general strike in Swami and Friends are there, because they lead to Swami's dismissal from Albert Mission High School. Consequently, it also leads to the breaking up of the little circle of Swami's school friends. Once the incident is over, we never hear any more of those public meetings. Swami and Rajam, too, get busy in practising for the coming cricket match. Even in Waiting for the Mahatma which is different from the rest of his novels in many respects, what interests him most (and the readers too) is not first-hand and accurate information about the activities of the Congress Party. It is the people, people like Bharati, the symbol of the new women of India who would not lag behind men in the struggle for freedom, Sriram, wavering between two worlds, and Mahatma Gandhi, who is too big to fit into this trivial love story, that he is really interested in. It is true that at times one feels as if Narayan has lost his characters somewhere and has started writing

the political history of the India of forties. But even then he is not totally irrelevant. After all, Bharati and Sriram are party workers, and their lives are directly determined by the program of their party.

As far as the physical setting is concerned, Waiting for the Mahatma differs from the rest of the Malgudi novels. In the last part of the book the hero leaves for New Delhi. The mission of this adventure is meeting the girl he loves and then asking for the Mahatma's permission to marry her. Sriram in New Delhi is almost like Alice in Wonderland.

Part Four of the book is exclusively devoted to Sriram's life in the Central Jail. There is nothing Malgudi-like about it. As a matter of fact, we hardly remember that this Central Jail is situated right in the heart of Malgudi. It is only through the visit like that of the Fund Office Manager that one can sense that it is somewhere near Malgudi. In Part Three the scene shifts from a ruined temple on the outskirts of the city, the headquarters of all the revolutionary activities of Sriram and Jagdish, to granny's death-bed, and then to the deserted house outside the city limits where granny is convalescing after it is discovered (on the cremation grounds) that she is not really dead. In Part Two the setting of the novel shifts. Sriram leaves Malgudi and visits all the villages around Mempi Hills and paints "Quit India" on the walls. It is only the first part of the book which

is set in the too-familiar streets and roads of Malgudi, and it is the best part. The Malgudi flavor is distinctly there.

West comes to Malgudi through Principal Brown of Albert Mission College and Demello of Hollywood, the brain behind the Sunrise Pictures. The result is, more or less, chaos. The East and the West might have met anywhere else but not in this Malgudi.

In selecting an imaginary town for his setting Narayan has some definite advantages. Obviously it gives him greater freedom in handling his setting. The tendency to seek for the real counterparts of the fictional characters and then to identify them absolutely is by no means a product of the twentieth century. It is an old ghost which has never been really dead. For critics it may be an engaging pastime, though not always an innocent one. For writers it has always been a terrible nightmare. It was so for Ben Jonson. The following excerpt from the agreement between the dramatist and the spectators (Bartholmew Fair) is as valid in the world of modern literary criticism as it ever was:

...finally agreed, by the aforesaid hearers and spectators that they neither in themselves conceal, nor suffer by them to be concealed, any state-decypherer or politic picklock of the scene, so solemnly ridiculous as to search out who was meant by the ginger-bread woman, who by the hobby-horse man, who by the costard-monger, nay who by their wares. Or that will pretend to affirm on his own inspired ignorance what *Mirrors of Magistrates* is meant by the justice, what great lady by the pig woman, what concealed statesman by the seller of mouse traps, and so of the rest. 29

Fortunately enough, Narayan escapes his "state-decypherers" and "politic picklocks." Malgudi is his and it is entirely his. Right from the shabby houses of Kabir Lane to the new-fashioned bungalows of Lawley Extension, he owns all of it. And in this fascinating town live people like Sampath and Margayya who are not less fascinating. The Malgudi of Narayan is different from the Ranchipur of Louis Bromfield, the Bhowani Junction of John Masters, the Calcutta of Bhabani Bhattacharya, and the New Delhi of Parwar Jhabhwala. It is India, India of the common man. Narayan does not romanticise the setting. Nor does he talk of the gutter of the city all the time. It is solid, real, so real that it becomes hard to believe that it is after all just an imaginary town.

Narayan's general approach to the world he spins around Malgudi does influence the atmosphere, the flavor to some extent. He is a "satirist" without any bitterness or reforming zeal, a comedian without any outbursts of laughter. His most effective weapons are gentle irony and a sense of native humor. The comedy of life is, however, touched by the undertones of sadness. The end of Raju (The Guide), a "reluctant holy man,"³⁰ is pathetic. Margayya's

²⁹The Works of Ben Jonson, ed. Francis Cunningham, II (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), pp. 147-48.

³⁰The New York Times Book Review, March 23, 1958, p. 5.

downfall, though inevitable, is not less tragic. Krishna's personal tragedy is shared by his creator. Sampath's mysterious disappearance seems to speak out, "there are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."³¹

Narayan lacks that objectivity which a satirist has to have. Satire implies three things: a norm of social and ethical behavior of the individual in relation to the institutions of society, an objectivity which lets the author see the oddities and absurdities from a distance, and a four-squared world around him where people are victims of hypocrisy, selfishness, possessiveness, always deviating from the norm. A satirist never feels satisfied with the world around him. There is always something drastic to be done or just pointed out. However, this is not true of Narayan. He himself is a part, an essential part of the world he has created for his Swami and Chandran, Savitri and Sushila. We feel as if he actually belongs to Malgudi. The dingy old structures, narrow, dusty and crowded roads, and the gutter with an awful stench--nothing shocks him. It is all within the pattern of a too-familiar landscape. And he needs no Ransomes³² to interpret this pattern for him. Ransomes can admire it, hate it, love it,

³¹ Hamlet, ed. J. R. Crawford (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), p. 34(I.v.166-67).

³² Ransome is the hero, the "central observer," in Louis Bromfield's The Rains Came.

but cannot understand it. There is bound to remain something strange and baffling. We have seen Malgudi's sunrise--hundreds of people going to the river Sarayu to take a bath. We have also seen Malgudi's sunset--the time for Sushila to light a lamp in her small temple. Here is a different kind of sunset--Ranchipur's sunset as seen by Ransome, the hero of The Rains Came:

It was the hour of the day that Ransome loved best and he sat on the verandah now, drinking brandy and watching the golden light flood all the banyan trees and the yellow-grey house and the scarlet creeper for one brilliant moment before the sun, with a sudden plunge, dropped below the horizon and left the whole countryside in darkness. It was a magical business which for his northern blood, accustomed to long still blue twilights of Northern England, never lost its strangeness--as if suddenly the whole world stood still for a second and then slipped swiftly into an abyss of darkness. For Ransome there was always a shadow of primitive terror in the Indian sunset.³³

It may be interesting to compare Malgudi's view as created by Narayan with another fictional town, Chandrapore, the setting of Forster's A Passage to India:

Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it [Chandrapore] trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist, they are

³³Louis Bromfield, The Rains Came (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1937), p. 1.

hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful....There is no painting and scarcely any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructable form of life.³⁴

This is Chandrapore--old, dirty, monotonous, bare, and different from the adjoining civil station where the Turtons and the Callendars keep themselves busy by their petty quarrels. The old town is of no interest to Forster, since everybody of any importance lives in the civil station. Who could be interested in the "mean streets" and "ineffective temples", and the Ganges which "ceases to be holy" in this odd little town?

The streets of Malgudi are no less "mean" and the bazaars no less dirty. Still, it fascinates us. Yes, Malgudi of Margayya, of Krishna, of Sampath does fascinate us. There is something in the very heart of this little town which appeals to us. The smells, sights and sounds, all are an essential part of the human world created by Narayan.

Narayan has often been compared to Gogol, the great Russian writer.³⁵ To some extent, this comparison is apt. Both Narayan and

³⁴E. M. Forster, A Passage to India (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1924), p. 1.

³⁵New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Nov. 29, 1953, p. 7; The New Yorker, April 25, 1953, p. 129.

Gogol deal with life in a local region. The atmosphere of their fictional worlds has a distinct flavor all their own. Another point which is of great interest in this connection is that both these writers depict the traditional values and beliefs against the background of a time of change. The old order of society is faced with the challenge of new ideas. In this struggle it has either to mould itself to the new tunes or break down under the weight of the pressure.

Gogol portrays life of a society which is more or less feudal in its structure but which is passing, though unwillingly, through a period of transition. His main interest is centered in small towns, and the people who inhabit them are mostly the country gentry. They have usually very big farms and a large number of serfs. The monotony of country life is broken by frequent visits to St. Petersburg. "Their drab colors, their smells, their confusion and filth and disorder are essential ingredients in Gogol's scene, and have much in common with the characters who play their parts against them as a background."³⁶

Narayan's *Malgudi*, however, is different from Gogol's small towns in several respects. *Malgudi* has no zamidārs (big landowners), no feudal chiefs, and no maharajahs. The people we meet in this

³⁶ Nikolai Gogol, Dead Souls, trans. George Reavey (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. vi.

South Indian small town are of the middle class. The pattern of their lives is partly determined by the age-old distinctions of caste and gotra. Trust in the traditional practices is the keynote of this unassuming picture of life. But the undercurrents of social, political and economic changes, though imperceptible at times, can hardly be ignored. What Taya Zinkin says of the changing pattern of Indian life in general may well apply to Malgudi to some extent:

Under the winds of change a land inhabited by 380 million people, one sixth of humanity, is waking up, stretching limbs stiffened with the slumber of centuries. In one sweep India is undergoing all the revolutions which have taken two centuries in the rest of the world. Equality and political rights; industrialization and urbanization; agrarian reforms and agricultural improvements; science and technology; social and personal emancipation are combining to transform a contented, static, rural, ritualistic society into a new and dynamic one where privilege is no longer inherited, where women are men's equal, and where Harijans (untouchables) are as important as Brahmins.³⁷

To try to interpret Indian life through the picture presented in the Malgudi novels may appear to be rather an over-enthusiastic approach. Malgudi has changed, no doubt, but it has been an extremely slow and cautious affair. By and large, it has not, to use Mrs. Zinkin's words in Malgudi's case, "yet done more than shake the stability" which comes from the sense of belonging to a family,

³⁷Taya Zinkin, India Changes! p. xi.

a clan, a caste, and a sect.

To come back to Gogol and Narayan, although there is much in common as far as the atmosphere and setting of the two fictional worlds are concerned, yet the way in which the two novelists use these are different. Their very starting points are different. Narayan differs from Gogol not only in his basic attitude towards life but also in his taste, his style, even his laughter. Narayan's Malgudi has a well-integrated pattern of life into which his characters fit somehow or other. There is evident a strange sense of contentment which is more often a result of a peculiar mental habit than an indicator of actual progress. Gogol, on the contrary, is obsessed with the frustration, poverty and squalor of the society he has seen and known intimately. It is true, it is hard to make such sweeping generalizations about his creativity. The Gogol of the early short stories (as in "Ivan Fyodorovitch Shoponka and his Aunt") is different from the Gogol of Dead Souls. The satire of "The Nose," a "biting exposure of the snobbery, self-complacency and stupidity of the Russian upper class,"³⁸ is too strong for any of Narayan's satirical portraits. Gogol's laughter, particularly in his later works, "vibrates

³⁸ Nikolai Gogol, Tales of Good and Evil, trans. David Margarshack (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957), p. 7.

with hidden rancour and satire." And, quite often he indulges in gorgeous splashes of color. Narayan's effects are, on the other hand, rather played-down. Very rarely does he use setting for just satire. Sometimes he uses it for the sake of social contrast. But the irony implied is gentle, though certainly not less effective.

The world of Malgudi is small, but it is exactly here where lies the greatness of this Indian novelist. Through a sense of intimacy and familiarity it makes a direct appeal to our heart. Small and unassuming as it is, it serves as the most apt background for the simple and ordinary lives of his Margayyas and Chandrans, Srinivases and Sampaths.

³⁹Janko Lavrin, Nikolai Gogol (London: Sylvan Press, 1951), p. 15.

CHAPTER II

PEOPLE

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos...lying in the experience of the human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tone.¹

It is this poetry and pathos of everyday life that Narayan is trying to discover in the Malgudi novels. The background of the small town with its drab and colorless streets, its unimposing buildings, and its seemingly insignificant landmarks is fused with life by the people who walk in these streets, live in these houses, and gaze with affection at these landmarks. There exists a strange sense of communion between the characters and the background. They grow out of it, live in it, and belong to it. But they do not exist for it. While Hardy's characters are apt to get lost on Egdon Heath, Narayan's go on undisturbed. Sarayu Street or Kabir Lane does not grow on them. They are there because they cannot help being anywhere else. The

¹George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907), p. 62.

subjective element is almost eliminated. The streets and the squares give an illusion of being wonderfully alive, but when it comes to the question of their relation to the inner life of the characters, they appear to be surprisingly untouched by human emotions. Sarayu flows on as ever when the dead body of Sushila is being carried to the cremation ground nearby. The trees in Nallappa Grove do not shed tears, and the stars above do not hang their heads in shame. Dickens surely would have made much more of such a background by developing its symbolism in relation to its people. Narayan is satisfied with it as it is. His chief interest lies in people, people in action--not as simple metaphysical units. What is said about Trollope is equally true of Narayan. "His peculiar gift lay in the delineation of human beings: people in their settings, doing things, that was how he saw life."²

Writing about the range of her characters George Eliot said:

There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude whose faces I know.... And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty

²The Trollope Reader, ed. E. C. Dunn and Marion E. Dodd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. xviii-xix.

streets and the common green fields, on the real breathing men and women....³

Like George Eliot Narayan prefers to create "the real breathing men and women" rather than meddle with glamorous illusions of life tinged with fanciful imagination. His Sampaths and Chandrans do not play their parts, but live, move in and out, talk and laugh, and then disappear only to appear again and again in the familiar sights. Unlike Dickens, Narayan is not so much interested in the oddities and incongruities of human behavior as in the even tenor, the rhythm and harmony of life. In his portrayal of these apparently insignificant people there is a tenderness which is very appealing and touching. It is what Margaret Parton means when she says in her review of Grateful to Life and Death, "No better way to understand what Mr. Nehru means by 'the tender humanity of India' than to read one of Mr. Narayan's novels."⁴ Narayan's tenderness should not, however, be misinterpreted. It is by no means sentimentality. He has enough of urbanity, detachment and objectivity to save him from the danger of running into sentimentality.

When we compare the range of characters who appear in the Malgudi novels with that of, say, Scott's, we find that it is extremely

³Adam Bede (New York and Boston: H. M. Caldwell Company, n.d.), p. 185.

⁴New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Nov. 29, 1953, p. 7.

limited. Most of Narayan's people belong to almost the same class of society. Of course, within the same class there are obvious and irreconcilable differences, and Narayan is very much aware of these. Unlike the usual type of novel written about India by tourist-authors, Malgudi cannot boast of having high dignitaries. There are no maharajahs wearing turbans worked with gold and diamonds, no maharanis representing oriental splendor--not even a nabab bahadur going for shikār in Mempi Hills of Malgudi! In Narayan's Malgudi there could hardly be a place for them. They would appear to be too conspicuous and awkward for it.

In spite of Raju's description of Malgudi's surroundings--its beautiful temples of great antiquity, perennial springs and other beauty spots, and more so, its big elephant-hunts organized by the Forest Department⁵--we do not come across any foreigners touring this part of the country. There are no Ransomes⁶ trying to bridge the gulf between the mystic East and the practical West, no Miss Questeds⁷ out to see the real India, not even a bewildered Miss Smith.⁸ It is

⁵Narayan, The Guide (New York: The Viking Press, 1958).

⁶Louis Bromfield, The Rains Came.

⁷E. M. Forster, A Passage to India.

⁸Christine Weston, The World is a Bridge (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1950).

said that in his next novel, The Matchmaker of Malgudi to be published by The Viking Press in the near future, Narayan is planning to introduce a young American scholar who comes to India to study its customs.⁹ It would be interesting to imagine his reactions to Malgudi and its people.

Even without Ransomes and Questeds Malgudi remains extremely interesting and alive. Its Sampaths and Margayyas are just the persons one could find only in such a background. Narayan writes about the people he knows best and places them in a region he knows most intimately. This conscious limitation of his subject matter becomes his strength. Like Jane Austen he knows the wisdom of writing within one's range. The obvious result is that he does not give us a blurred, formless panorama, but a neat, perfectly composed, sharply focussed, and astonishingly real picture of a South Indian small town.

The people whom we meet in Narayan's Malgudi are genuinely Malgudian. Broadly speaking, they all belong to the middle class. There are hardly any from the upper class playing a role of any significance. In fact, whenever they appear, it is more because they just slip in rather than wait outside. Narayan's best satire is found in these occasions of "slipping in." Soma Sundram, the District Board President (The Printer of Malgudi) is the best example. He is

⁹The New York Times Book Review, January 18, 1959, p. 8.

illiterate (as most of the District Board Presidents are!), but Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, has bestowed her blessings on him profusely. The first time we see him, he is at the door of the Truth Printing Press. He is wearing a close-neck coat and a turban. His face appears to be rather rigid, and with a finger he is flicking his moustache. The purpose of this "solemn" visit is to admonish Sampath for delay in the printing of the speech (several hands had written it, the author smilingly informs us) which he is to deliver at the ceremony of opening a bridge on Sarayu.

The way in which Sampath takes care of Somu Sundram shows Narayan's skill in utilising simple farcical situations for creating living characters. Somu Sundram is just ridiculous, and he is meant to be so. With great disappointment we learn that the District Board President cannot use the bridge opening speech because the ceremony never comes off. Sundram has to relinquish the office also because "it is too hard a life for a conscientious man."¹⁰ Who could be more conscientious than the honorable president! Perhaps it is again the pricking of his conscience and a very strong desire to serve his country (according to his version) which urge him to start a new film company. He thinks himself to be a very "discriminating" critic of such issues

¹⁰ The Printer of Malgudi, p. 111.

as plot, acting, dances and so on. Commenting on a particular story for the film the Sunrise Pictures wants to make, he says: "The advantage in this is that there is any amount of love in the story, and people will like it. Personally, also, I never like to read any story if it has no love in it."¹¹ When the story with "any amount of love in it" has been written, Somu Sundram, the producer of Sunrise Pictures, finds it lacking in some other respect: "One thing, Mister, I want you to remember. You must not fail to introduce a comic interlude." A slight frown came on Srinivas's face:

I don't see how any comic interlude can be put into this.

Please try. It would make the picture very popular. People would come again and again to laugh. Personally, do you know I always like something which makes me laugh.¹²

By the end of the novel we come to know all about the "personal" likings and aversions of the Ex-President. Mr. Natesh, another District Board President (successor to Somu Sundram?) whom we meet in Waiting for the Mahatma, is a character who comes very near to being a caricature. He wants to be the host of Mahatma Gandhi during the latter's stay in Malgudi because:

I have spent two lakhs on the building, my garden and lawns alone have cost me twenty-five thousand rupees so far. What

¹¹Ibid., pp. 125-26.

¹²Ibid., p. 150.

do you think I have done it for? I am a simple man, sir, my needs are very simple. I don't need any luxury. I can live in a hut, but the reason why I have built it on this scale is that I should be able for at least once in my lifetime, to receive a great soul like Mahatmajī.¹³

The logic seems to be unassailable. But how much of it is really true is open to question.

In addition to the chain of presidents, we have Rajam's father, who is Deputy Superintendent of Police. Through him we get a glimpse of the officer class. The story being that of Swami and his friends, we never go beyond the four walls of Rajam's room. There is no attempt to describe the furniture or the plan of the house. We never meet Rajam's mother. The only time she is mentioned is when Rajam visits Swami's house and tells granny that his mother had a black trunk filled with jewels and a green one containing gold and silver vessels. What type of dress she wears and what kind of meals she cooks--nothing is known.

Rajam's father, too, appears only once in the novel. As a senior police officer he is responsible for maintaining law and order in the city. When a procession is organized by the Congress Party workers, Rajam's father, considering the peace of the city to be in danger, orders a lathi charge. Here, too, he is not shown as an individual but only as an instrument of the ruling class--a custodian of British prestige.

¹³Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 33.

Principal Brown of Albert Mission College, who gets a thousand rupees per month, is surely, at least by Malgudi standards, a rich man. But accurately speaking, he does not seem to belong to the social structure of Malgudi. He is an outsider, and he prefers to remain so. He has spent more than thirty years in India, but his stay in this country has not succeeded in making any impact on his attitudes. He still remains a believer in the white man's burden. A long stay in India has rather strengthened this belief. "We are not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!" shouts Ronny to his mother when he is told about Adela's complaint that Anglo-Indians behave very rudely in India. "We are out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them's my sentiments. India isn't a drawing room."¹⁴ The sentiments of Ronny Heaslop, the district judge in Forster's A Passage to India, are the sentiments shared by almost every Anglo-Indian. Brown is no exception to this. The difference between him and Ronny is not that of kind but of degree. If instead of being the principal of a mission college he had been a district judge, he would perhaps have said the same thing. In Malgudi Narayan does not give any important role to him. He is rather a background figure. Other characters refer to him indirectly. The references are both pleasant and unpleasant. He is very strict as

¹⁴ A Passage to India, pp. 49-50.

far as the prestige of British imperialism is concerned. A college student dropping u in "honour" is a matter of grave concern for him, and the English Department of his college is very promptly made aware of the gravity of the situation. And yet, Brown himself cannot speak even such a simple sentence as "The cat chases the rat" in any of the two hundred Indian languages (according to Krishna). The only thing he has learnt is the cultivation of extreme caution in approaching the over-spiced South Indian food! Brown has, however, a very good sense of humor (which he mostly uses when delivering presidential addresses) and a good stock of short and spicy anecdotes of his Oxford days. Whatever popularity he has, it is based on these two things.

Before considering the stratum of the people portrayed in Malgudi, there are some points which need a little clarification. Firstly, the term "middle class" is very ambiguous. It may not always mean the same thing. A slight variation in the context may make a change in the meaning. Middle class in Malgudi is not the same as middle class in Bombay or Delhi. While the broader distinctions hold true, the internal boundaries are highly variable. Chandran's father obviously belongs to the upper middle class, but if put anywhere else--say, in New Delhi--he would rather be considered as an average middle middle-class person. Even within Malgudi it is hard to label a person with a specific, cut-and-dried distinction. Different shades within a particular social

class defy any attempt at accurate labelling.

Secondly, the social structure of Hindu society is very peculiar in the sense that the social position of a particular individual is determined not so much by his material prosperity as by the caste in which he is born. A person belonging to a lower caste may earn money and be financially in a better position than a Brahmin, but when it comes to the question of social prestige and respect, he cannot stand on equal terms with a Brahmin. A Shudra can not be a Brahmin.¹⁵ It is useless for him to think along those lines because he knows that he can never become one. Conversely, a Brahmin may bring disgrace to his caste and clan by his bad conduct, but he still remains a Brahmin. Since it is not possible for an individual to rise or fall beyond the range of his immediate society, there is practically no scope for choice and initiative.

¹⁵Originally Hindu society was divided into four groups. Unlike Dharma and Karma, the caste system (Varna) had no religious sanctions. It was primarily a social development which helped in stabilising (eventually stagnating also) the Hindu social set-up. The four caste divisions in the order of decreasing status are as follows: A Brahmin belongs to the highest group. The very word "Brahmin" means "of Brahma." It is believed that he was originally born out of the mukh (mouth) of Brahma (the Creator God). A Brahmin is expected to be well-versed in holy scriptures. He has not only to possess this knowledge, he is supposed to impart it to his disciples too. Thus, he is a scholar as well as a teacher. With the profession of learning he combines the priestly duties. He alone can perform the religious ceremonies. He wears the sacred thread--the symbol of being

This is the traditional pattern of Hindu society. It means stability, contentment but stagnation also. The winds of change, however, have blown very hard. This change is both from within and without. It is slowly bringing a revolution in the age-old stratified society. The class distinctions are becoming less and less rigid. They are losing much of their self-imposed power. The impact of democratic principles, education, and urbanization has been tremendous in this direction.

In a study of Narayan's characters it is necessary to find out the extent to which his people are influenced and determined by caste distinctions. Narayan's Malgudi is not casteless, nor is he trying to

"twice born." Being twice born simply means that one has been formally initiated into one's religious fold. Next in the order are Kshatriyas--warriors, kings. The ideals to which they are devoted are bravery, courage and duty. The third group is Vaishyas, the business community. The lowest in the rung are Shudras and Harijans, more often known as Untouchables. The first three castes can wear the sacred thread while the Shudras cannot.

Each caste has its own taboos and regulations. Marriage between different castes (or even the sub-castes) is not allowed. Today the caste system is undergoing revolutionary changes. The traditional barriers are breaking down. As a result, there has been more intermixing between different castes and sub-castes than could ever be imagined even fifty years ago. There is now more freedom in the choice of one's profession, and the hold of caste is getting looser. Of course, a Brahmin would not do the job of a sweeper, but he can be a business man or join the police if he so desires.

make it one. As members of a traditionally stratified society, his people know their sanctioned places, duties and responsibilities. Their attitude is that of conformists. They dare not take any step which would throw them outside the circle of their own kin.

What is still more significant is the fact that in the Malgudi novels the complex social stratification remains just a background, an essential background. Narayan does not specify his people in terms of castes and sub-castes. Of course, he does not totally eliminate such distinctions, but at the same time he does not make them his major issues. Neither his themes nor his plots are determined by such considerations.

This distinction can be better understood if Narayan's novels are considered against the background of such novels as Untouchable¹⁶ or He Who Rides a Tiger.¹⁷ The dominant theme of both these novels is the same: the rigid stratification of Hindu society, its social and psychological implications, and the inevitable inter-caste conflicts and clashes.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger has for its hero, Kalo--a Chamar (cobbler) by birth. Sulekha, his daughter, is a brilliant

¹⁶Mulk Raj Anand, Untouchable (London: Hutchinson International Authors, 1947).

¹⁷Bhabani Bhattacharya, He Who Rides a Tiger (New York: Crown Publishers, 1954).

student, but she has to suffer great humiliation, because she is a Chamar girl. During the Bengal Famine when Kalo and his family have nothing to eat in the village, they go to Calcutta. Things are not much better there. When he fails to make a living, he devises a plan which works out very well. He changes his name, pretends that he is a Brahmin, and immediately becomes the head priest of a temple which the city fathers have to build because Kalo has seen a miracle--the appearance of God Shiva on that spot. This arrangement goes on smoothly for sometime. When the truth is out, the Brahmins become furious and are about to kill him, but Kalo has the courage to "drive the steel deep into the tiger"--the tiger he had been riding. Finally, he returns to his own people. It is evident that the main action, the motivation and the characters--all are determined by the fact that Kalo is a Chamar and not a Brahmin.

Like He Who Rides a Tiger Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable is based on the caste system and its social implications. It describes a day in the life of a sweeper, Bakha, very realistically. The great catastrophe (when accidentally a high caste Hindu is touched by him) occurs in the morning and it makes Bakha miserable throughout the day. The book closes with three solutions. The first one by Hutchinson, a Salvationist missionary, is to be a Christian. The second is Gandhi's--all Indians are equal, and even a Brahmin should have no shame in doing

scavenging work. The third solution is of a modernist. He advocates the use of the flush system. Bakha's "Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand."¹⁸

Narayan is aware of such a change on the surface of the earth, but he is equally aware of the roots that lie too deep for the winds of change to disturb them. Chandran's mother cannot even think of having Chandran marry outside his caste. Margayya consults his priest-adviser before making any plans for future prosperity. Life goes on easily and leisurely. Total conformity to socially accepted patterns is the keynote of this life. The little complications which a Chandran might create bring a temporary wave of discontent, but the structure remains intact. Distinctions of caste and clan are so implicit and all-pervasive that Narayan does not have to point them out and then make them his battle slogans. His people believe in superstitions and they are very slow in recognizing the need for a change in the traditional attitudes. But the novelist accepts them as they are. He does not take them to task for their beliefs and tastes. It is here that he differs from novelists like Anand.

Next to the caste distinction the other major factor which

¹⁸Untouchable, p. 7.

determines the picture of life in Malgudi is obviously wealth. Malgudi does not appear to be a town of great extremes. At least the people we meet in these novels belong to almost the same class of society. Of course, within the broad range of this class there are obvious differences. At one end of the scale may be put Chandran's father. With two servants, one cook and one gardener, his family is certainly not rich, but at the best, upper middle class. Keeping other factors in view, we could say that their scale of living is quite modest. Margayya, the sad ambitious absurd financial expert, touches the lower limits of this class. There was a time, the story tells, when his father was considered a well-to-do citizen. But that is a thing of the past. With the big house divided and very little good feeling left between the two brothers, Margayya has to face a life of bitter struggle.

The case of Sriram is slightly different. The maintenance pension of twenty years has accumulated and on his twentieth birthday he has more than thirty-eight thousand rupees. But he is never seen spending much of his money. Nor is he very conscious of his possessions. The only immediate visible effect of the material prosperity is seen in the canvas easy chair that he buys the very day that money comes into his hands.

"Mediocrity," says Kiran in The World is a Bridge, "is the keystone of middle class Indian society -- a drab imitation of drab

European ideas, the surrender of all that is vital and characteristic in favor of expedience."¹⁹ To some extent Kiran's remarks (with some qualifications) may equally be true of the middle class pioneered by Narayan. There are all kinds of people in this class: lawyers, teachers, clerks, petty businessmen, newspaper agents, and editors. It is true, no doubt, that most of them believe in traditions and are very suspicious about any kind of change. They are very conservative in their food, dress and social customs. But it is a strange paradox that underneath all this conservatism there flows the undercurrent of a desire to imitate "drab European ideas." This is more than evident in the field of education.

Malgudi is blessed with a very fine college, Albert Mission College. Boys like Chandran and Natesan spend about four years in it. What are they taught there? Greek drama, Shakespeare, Milton, the history of the English language, modern European history, logic, political science and so on. Subjects like ancient Indian history and culture do not seem to have a place in this Westernised curriculum. Nor are they taught any of the Indian languages or literatures. They can quote Wordsworth, Shakespeare and Shelley with great ease, but

¹⁹Christine Weston, The World is a Bridge, p. 33.

are shockingly indifferent to Kalidasa²⁰ and Banabhatt.²¹ Most probably they are completely unaware of them. They study Plato and Aristotle, but they neglect Kautiliya. The study of Kant is considered to be necessary, but Shankracharya and his Vedanta can be left alone.

What kind of men do institutions like Albert Mission College produce? Mediocre, imitative, complacent--at best, good Bābus. It served the purpose of the rulers all right. But in the heart of the country a big gap was left somewhere, and it has never been filled. The impact of the Western winds has created a superficial and fossilized culture. The result is a muddle-headed confusion. In this confusion people like Chandran naturally feel lost. They join Albert Mission College with big dreams which they can never realise and confidence which proves to be only a temporary phase. After years of struggle with European history and Greek drama when they come out of it--of course, with the label of a degree--it is a different world, the world of reality, that they have to face. "You lived in the college, thinking that you were the first and the last the college

²⁰ What Shakespeare is to English literature, Kalidasa is to Sanskrit. He lived in the time of the Gupta Kings (around 400 A.D.). Some of his best known pieces are Meghdūta, Kumārsambhava and Raghuvansha.

²¹ Bana lived in the time of Harshavardhan (around 620 A.D.).

would ever see, and you ended as a group photo. . . ." ²² thinks Chandran. A group photo can decorate Chandran's living room, but it can not fill the gap left in his life by his training--the gap between illusion and reality. Krishna, the hero of Grateful to Life and Death, may appear to be over-critical in his estimate of the education system; but he is basically right and has the honesty to tell what he thinks is right. He decides to resign his job in the college, because he feels that he is not doing what he should do. "I was going to attack a whole century of false education," he explains. "...I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis, theories and histories, while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage." ²³

The question of entertainment, though in itself not very important, acquires significance when treated in the context of

Some of his more well-known works are Harashcharitra, Kadambri, and Vāsavdatta.

²²The Bachelor of Arts, p. 144.

²³Grateful to Life and Death, p. 205.

seesaw between East and West that Malgudi witnesses. It is quite natural for boys like Swami and Rajam who go to the Westernised Albert Mission High School to play cricket instead of an Indian game. The monotony of life in Malgudi is relieved by occasional visits to the Select Picture House. Ironically enough, the pictures shown in this Select Picture House are hardly select. At their best they reflect the spirit of mediocrity and imitation in which the Indian film-makers excel. In The Bachelor of Arts, after the Union debate is over, Chandran and Ramu go to see "Lightguns of Lauro" with Vivian Trollet and Georgie Lomb in it. The picture has "an enormous quantity of love, valour, villainy, intrigue, battle."²⁴ The picture that the Sunrise Film Company of Sampath makes is no better than the imported stuff. The background music in "The Burning of Kama" (supposed to be an Indian mythological story) is South American. Shiva and Parvati²⁵ dancing to a South American tune! Nothing can be more ridiculous than this.

It will be misleading to judge the people of Malgudi by cricket, "Lightguns of Lauro," and "The Burning of Kama." At the best all these things show that Malgudi, though a sleepy old town, has not

²⁴The Bachelor of Arts, p. 15.

²⁵Parvati is the spouse of Shiva, the destroyer God.

entirely escaped the influence of the winds from the West. The basic pattern of life remains the same. It is in this pattern that Narayan is most interested. His picture of family life is authentic, warm, and intimate. Through typical scenes of domestic life (such as the following) he creates an atmosphere which adds to the verisimilitude of the total picture:

My mother came down and welcomed her at the gate. She had decorated the threshold with a festoon of green mango leaves and the floor and doorway with white flour designs. She was standing at the doorway and as soon as we got down cried: 'Let Sushila and the child stay where they are.' She had a pan of vermillion solution ready at hand and circled it before the young mother and child, before allowing them to get down from the carriage. After ~~that~~ she held out her arm, and the baby vanished in her embrace.²⁶

Details such as these are fascinating. One can almost see an Indian mother-in-law welcoming her son's wife and child. There is no affectation in it. It is important to note that Narayan does not believe in fidelity to the accuracy of details for their own sake. He gives details, not because he wants to say, "Look! Here is an Indian mother-in-law. Don't miss the mango leaves, vermillion in the pan, and the auspicious floral designs," but because it reflects an important aspect of the character of Krishna's mother.

The twentieth birthday of Sriram is a special occasion. This

²⁶Grateful to Life and Death, p. 35.

is the way Granny celebrates it:

Granny had somewhere secured a yard-long sugar cane for the celebration, although it was not the season. She said: 'No birthday is truly celebrated unless and until a sugar cane is seen in the house. It's auspicious.' She strung mango leaves across the doorway, decorated the threshold with colored rice powder. A neighbor passing down the road stopped to ask:

'What's the celebration? Shall we blow out the ovens in our house and come for the feast in yours?'

'Yes, by all means. Most welcome,' said the old lady courteously, and added as if to neutralize the invitation, 'You are always welcome.' She felt sorry at not being able to call in the neighbors, but that recluse grandson of hers had forbidden her to invite anyone.²⁷

In less than a hundred words Narayan not only creates the atmosphere but also portrays the character of the old lady indirectly. She is superstitious. Sugar cane has to be procured on a birthday, because it is auspicious. She is of a secretive nature, since nobody else knows that it is a birthday celebration. Moreover, she is highly diplomatic and shrewd. "You are always welcome" means that the neighbor should not think that she has been invited for this occasion. She is extremely attached to her grandson, who is highly unsocial and prefers to be left alone.

Almost all the characters in Malgudi novels are Hindus. There is rarely a person belonging to another faith. It is so, not because Narayan has any preference for a certain religion and antagonism for

²⁷Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 8.

another, but because the town he is creating is predominantly Hindu. Moreover, he knows the life of a Hindu family more intimately, and like any other sensible writer he deals with the life he knows best. Principal Brown, Demello of Hollywood, and Mr. Jbenzar are Christians. Gaffur, the taxi driver in The Guide, and Aziz, Principal Brown's peon, are Muslims. Narayan, however, does not make anything out of this religious distinction.

This point becomes clearer if Narayan's novels are re-read in the light of such a novel as The World is a Bridge by Christine Weston. Miss Weston sets her novel in the troubled times of 1946-47. The interrelation between the two religious groups, Hindus and Muslims, the outside pressure affecting this relationship, and finally the communal riots are at the center of the book. Other complications, personal and political, grow out of it and are greatly influenced by the central issue. Some of Narayan's novels cover almost the same period, but his perspective being different, such problems are not touched.

Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma covers the span of about ten years, 1938-48. The first four parts of the book are set in pre-independence India. The last part deals with the very crucial time of Indian history--India divided into two parts, communal riots, and the uprooting of millions of people. This is exactly the background of Christine Weston's novel. The question arises: how much

does Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma convey the sense of this terrible suffering? Practically nothing. There are hardly three or four indirect references. In two short paragraphs Bharati relates her experiences when she was accompanying Mahatma Gandhi in his Noakhli tour. In another context she refers to her responsibility of looking after the refugee children whose parents have been killed or lost in the communal riots. However, the novelist should not be blamed for what he leaves out. In this particular case it is important that the perspective of the novelist be taken into consideration. Firstly, Waiting for the Mahatma is not a social or political history. It is a work of fiction. The novelist is free to choose whatever angle he likes. Secondly, Narayan's emphasis is on portraying Sriram, Bharati, Mahatma Gandhi, and their interrelationships. What is significant is the fact that the story tends to move on a personal level of characterization. In the last analysis it turns out to be a neat little love story complicated by the political situation of the country.

In A Passage to India E. M. Forster talks about "the spirit of the Indian earth which tries to keep men in compartments."²⁸ Narayan is obviously not concerned with this "compartmenting spirit" to which Forster refers. He deals with what is common in the people around

²⁸ A Passage to India, p. 127.

him: love, suffering, happiness, grief, laughter, kindness, and hypocrisy.

In the mind of an average Western reader India is thought of as being "a land of mystery and mysticism, the birthplace of many occult sciences and practices, of curious rites, ceremonies and superstitions... of untold wealth and priceless jewels, either lying buried in the ground or concealed in strange ways and places."²⁹ Such a reader is sure to get a pleasant surprise on reading the Malgudi novels. There are no diamond-hunts, no yoga practices, no mysteries of the zenana revealed. Nor is there any attempt made to solve the metaphysical problems of soul, the ultimate reality, and reincarnation. It is Malgudi, the Malgudi of Srinivas and Sampath preoccupied with its daily living, that Narayan has to offer.

Forster divides characters into two categories, flat and round. When this two-fold division is applied to Narayan's characters, it does not work out. His characters are neither the "I never will desert Mr. Micawber" type nor are they perfectly rounded. They belong rather to the intermediate shades between flat and round. For example, there is Sriram, the hero of Waiting for the Mahatma; it is hard to decide whether he is flat or round. If he is round at all, his rotundity is not

²⁹Bhupal Singh, A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 268.

enough to make him stand on the same level as Srinivas, Sampath, and Krishna do. Somewhere he is lacking something essential. Consequently, at the end of the novel he remains the same as he was in the beginning. The only difference which is perceptible is that he has won beautiful Bharati. In other respects he remains the same: a romantic booby, irresponsible, headstrong, and bashful.

Sriram has very little independence of thought. Even his contact with such a personality as Mahatma Gandhi hardly makes any difference in his approach to life. He is so fickle-minded that the moment Bharati is in prison he is led away by Jagdish, a member of a secret terrorist organization. After several years when he is released from the prison, he does not indulge in any kind of self-reproach. He is a little sad, not because he had been unfaithful to the principles of truth and non-violence for which Mahatma lived and died, but because he has missed a chance to be near Bharati. The dominant passion of his life is his love for this girl. It is love at first sight, and has enveloped his whole existence. All the time he thinks of her and dreams of her. It is quite another thing that he does not possess any will power to get to doing anything about it. There is something abnormal in the entire make-up of his personality. The early death of his parents, a severe upbringing by the old granny, and the feeling that nobody thinks of him as a grown-up person lie behind this abnormality. There

is something pathetic in his need to love someone. When we think of the chances that he has missed, the love and security of family life that he never had, we do not think of him as entirely absurd. He deserves more pity and sympathy than laughter. This is how he feels when he happens to see Bharati for the first time:

As he approached the Market Fountain a pretty girl came up and stopped him. "Your contribution?" she asked, shaking a sealed tin collection box. Sriram's throat went dry and no sound came. He had never been spoken to by any girl before; she was slender and young, with eyes that sparkled with happiness. He wanted to ask, "How old are you? What caste are you? Where is your horoscope? Are you free to marry me?"³⁰

This is Sriram at twenty-four. At the end of the novel (Book V) he is still practically the same. More than six years have passed. The country is passing through the most crucial times of its existence. Sriram has served his term of imprisonment. Has there really come a change in him? Has he become a bit wiser and more sober? Perhaps not.

The following extract which describes a trivial incident that happened on the day before Mahatma's assassination does indicate that he has not grown:

He saw one of her saris hanging up, a white one with yellow spots. It was of course made of khadi, hand spun; the rope sank under its weight. He pulled it down to take it in his hands and gauge its weight, reflecting, "She ought

³⁰Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 19.

to wear finery, poor girl. I will give her everything." He took it in his hand and weighed it. "It seems to weigh twenty pounds." He stretched it and held it before his eyes, "It's like a metal sheet. She must feel stuffy under it. I can't see any light through it." He rolled it up and pressed it to his breast. It had a faint aroma of sandalwood which pleased him. "It has the fragrance of her own body," he reflected closing his eyes.

As he sat there the door opened and Bharati stood before him. "What are you doing with my sari?" she asked in surprise. "One would think that you were trying to wear it," she said with a laugh. Sriram reddened and put it hastily away.

"It does not try to ward me off," he said, "when I take it to my heart."

"Hush!" she cried. "Don't try to be silly. We are all very serious people here, remember."³¹

A little later when she carries his dirty clothes to give them to the washerman, he reflects:

She is almost my wife, she is doing what a wife should do, good girl! God bless her. If I tie a thali³² around her neck somehow, when she is asleep, things will be all right.³³

This is Sriram at thirty.

With Sriram as the central character the scope of the novel becomes extremely limited. One feels that the author has stuffed it

³¹Ibid., pp. 227-28.

³²A thali is a special kind of necklace worn by married women in South India. Putting a thali around the bride's neck is a part of the marriage ceremony.

³³Waiting for the Mahatma, pp. 227-28.

with too many other things: the details about the 1942 movement, jail life, life in Mahatma Gandhi's camp. All this additional knowledge hardly helps us much in knowing Sriram more intimately. On the other hand, if the aim of the novelist is to give a close picture of Mahatma's life or about the political upheavals in the country, he has not very much succeeded in doing so. Either it is a love story of Sriram and Bharati, or it is a story of the Mahatma, or perhaps it is both. In either way it creates an impression of inevitable muddle. The reviewer is justified when he says, "Narayan's refreshingly original talent shows at its best in his descriptions of Sriram by himself and of Sriram's old life at home. Party workers and the maneuvers and developments of the party receive a treatment that is, to say the most of it, bored."³⁴

The portrait of Mahatma Gandhi is also not very successful. He appears to be too big for the role he is supposed to play in the novel. Narayan tries to make us see the Mahatma from a very close angle. He uses the point of view of Bharati and Sriram for this purpose. Perhaps he succeeds in it to a very small extent. But he cannot totally eliminate the distance which is inevitable when a great contemporary public figure is fossilized into a fictional character.³⁵ However, the

³⁴The New Yorker, Dec. 10, 1955, p. 220.

³⁵In this connection Douglas Hewit's comment in the Manchester Guardian (August 30, 1955, p. 4.) is interesting. Reviewing the book

presence of Mahatma Gandhi in the novel serves a very important functional purpose. On one hand, it is a good background for the unconventional love affair of Bharati and Sriram. On the other, since Bharati is so intimately related to him and will not take any decision unless "Bapu" gives his permission, this very act of "waiting" keeps the story moving.

The best done portrait in Waiting for the Mahatma is that of the old grandmother. Granny appears only in the first few pages. After it Sriram (and Narayan, too) seems to have forgotten her completely. The incident about her "death" and then the miraculous revival, though not utterly impossible, still has the air of contrivance. Since her re-entry into the town is considered by the local priest as inauspicious, she is allowed to stay in a deserted house outside the city limits. As she cannot stay there forever, she is packed off for Benares³⁶ in time. Once she has left Malgudi, she has left Waiting for the Mahatma.

However small a part the old granny may have to play in the

he says, "The portrait of the Mahatma is not altogether successful, but it is worth wondering whether any living novelist could satisfactorily portray a saint."

³⁶Benares is a holy city, situated on the banks of the river Ganges. It is commonly believed that one who dies in Benares goes to heaven. With a desire to go to heaven many old people go there to spend the last days of their lives.

novel, she turns out to be more alive than all the rest of the characters put together. The way that Narayan achieves the desired effect by so few strokes is admirable. There are hardly any long-winded descriptions of the old lady. It is only once that a reference is made to her stature.³⁷ We know very little about the dress she wears and the food she makes, but still before the end of Part One, we know her as intimately as we would know one of our own near relations.

One of the guiding principles of old granny is to keep a secret to oneself. "What happens behind one's door," she explains to her grandson, "must be known only to the folk concerned."³⁸ She is sorry that her husband was not like that. She thinks that he ruined himself by talking. "Anything that happened to him, good or bad, was bound to be known to everyone in the town within ten minutes; otherwise his soul felt restless."³⁹ Like an old wise grandmother she wants to guard young Sriram against it.

Old granny has her own ideas about certain things and she is not

³⁷Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 8. "She seemed to shrink in stature under an open sky--she who dominated the landscape under the roof of Number 14--lost her stature completely in the open."

³⁸Ibid., p. 9.

³⁹Ibid., p. 10.

one to change. For example, ordinary canvas, she thinks, must be some kind of leather (most probably of cow). Therefore, it would definitely pollute her if she came in contact with it. Her views on Gandhi and his teachings are her own. "For her the Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into the temples, and who involved people in difficulties with the police."⁴⁰ She is ignorant, superstitious, secretive, but at the same time she is affectionate and devoted. To some extent she resembles Aunt Phoebe of The Rains Came. It is mostly through her that even in a poorly-unified novel Narayan's gift for characterization comes through triumphantly.

Compared with Sriram, Sampath is far more complex and rounded. In the words of Donald Barr, "Sampath is a masterly first-impressionist in whose spacious gestures and rich evasive words a creaky press and one exhausted boy somehow become a big establishment and who moves among the imagination of his friends like some minor deity."⁴¹ The moment he enters the novel, he not only takes charge of the publication of the weekly, The Banner, but also takes the novel itself from the hands of Srinivas. It no longer remains the story of an editor; it becomes his story, the story of the printer of Malgudi.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 55.

⁴¹The New York Times Book Review, May 9, 1957, p. 14.

The printer of Malgudi has his own method of handling his business. It does not really matter what kind of work he produces. It is always the "best"--even the worst specimen of his printing, thin transparent paper with ink coming through it. One of his pet phrases is "You cannot get this finish in the whole of South India." The tone is always so persuasive that the customer is left with no alternative but to believe that it is so.

The printer of Malgudi has, however, not always been a printer. There was a time (before our novel starts) when he was a theater actor. The large portrait of a man, who is no one else but Sampath, "with side whiskers, wearing a tattered felt hat, with a long pipe sticking out of a corner of his mouth,"⁴² hung on the wall of his room speaks eloquently of that side of his character. As a matter of fact, he has, he proudly informs Srinivas, always been interested in make-up, costumes, and the stage. We have to quietly accept this claim after we read the last few sections of the book.

When all of a sudden due to "an unexpected strike of the staff" the business of the Truth Printing Works fails, its immediate effect is on The Banner; the publication of the weekly ceases. Naturally it puts Editor Srinivas in a very embarrassing situation.

⁴²The Printer of Malgudi, p. 103.

But Sampath is already on his way to another adventure:

"A friend of mine is starting a film company and I'm joining him," quietly he informs Srinivas. It is nothing less than a shock for the latter. Sampath has already anticipated the reaction.

"Don't look so stunned: we shall be well on our way to the rotary when my first film is completed."

"Film? Film?" Srinivas gasped. "I never knew that you were connected with any film--."

"I've always been interested in films. Isn't it the fifth largest industry in our country? How can I or anyone be indifferent to it?"⁴³

Srinivas has nothing more to say. He himself can no longer remain indifferent to it. Sampath's theatrical experience of his early days stands him in good stead. Experience or no experience, he finds himself competent enough to handle any situation, to play any role--from director to actor and dancer. This film-producing adventure, however, has complications of its own. Sampath's love for Shanti, the beautiful heroine of "The Burning of Kama," further complicates the whole situation. On the last page of the novel the Ex-Printer-Director-Actor is left with no alternative but to become invisible like Kama--the god of love in the movie they had been trying to make. "Otherwise," he is afraid, "Sohan Lal and Somu have enough reason to put me in prison."⁴⁴

⁴³Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 275.

Whether Sohan Lal and Somu really put him into prison, we do not know. But this much is certain that Sampath turns out to be one of the most fascinating characters that Narayan has ever created. This fascination comes partly from the complexity of his character. He is far from being a pure comedy character. His "tricks" are laughable, but the irony underlying the situations tinges the laughter with sadness. He professes to be an optimist,⁴⁵ and is very likely such. But when this apparent optimism is studied against the drab, ill-fitting background of his family life--the outhouse with a gabled front and two small rooms, sickly children, the bundles of unwashed clothes pushed into a corner--his whole personality gains an inexpressible depth. Then, one can understand why he never lets anyone peep into the other side of the purple curtain of his establishment. There is something pathetic in his attempts to create a world of illusion. Yet the total impression that one gets is not of pathos. Sampath is, no doubt, a clever but basically a good man who is always busy in all kinds of manipulations. His love for the film star Shanti is melodramatic, and his plans for marrying her are ludicrous. When he walks out of The Printer of Malgudi, we do not know whether to believe or disbelieve his adventures of Mempi Hills Rest House. One thing is certain; his

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 68.

dreams of having a "rotary" and re-publishing The Banner have not been fulfilled.

Krishna, the hero of Grateful to Life and Death, is another of Narayan's three-dimensional characters. He is young, imaginative, well-educated, and sincere. But he is placed in a job which he does not like very much. He is critical of the restraint and the monotony of such a life. Consequently, he strongly feels that he is missing something, some new experiences of life. Analysing the causes of this dissatisfaction, he says:

Perhaps such repose was not in my nature, because I was a poet, and I was constantly nagged by the feeling that I was doing the wrong work. This was responsible for a perpetual self-criticism and all kinds of things aggravated it.⁴⁶

This quality of self-criticism is common to almost all the main characters of the Malgudi novels. The difference between Chandran, Srinivas, and Krishna is only that of degree. Krishna suffers more because he thinks more and feels more. However, in compensation he receives a very happy life at home. The little, seemingly insignificant details of their home life not only add to the atmosphere and the color of the novel, they also help in revealing various aspects of the growth of Krishna's character. The death of his wife leaves a

⁴⁶Grateful to Life and Death, p. 1.

big blank in his life. There is nothing more poignant and touching than the following extract from his diary. The funeral ceremony is over, and

We are on our homeward march, a silent and benumbed gang. As we cross Nallappa's Grove once again, I cannot resist the impulse to turn and look back. Flames appear over the wall.... It leaves a curiously dull pain at heart. There are no more shocks and surprises in life, so that I watch the flames without agitation. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else.... Nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter.⁴⁷

Something does interest him; it is his three-year-old daughter whose upbringing becomes more than a sacred duty to him. The communion with the spirit of his dead wife, resigning the job in the college, and interest in a children's nursery school provide ample repose to his troubled mind. As a result, he finds "the moments of rare immutable joy--moments for which one feels grateful to life and death."⁴⁸

Swami and Friends is a very innocent and delightful picture of a young boy baffled by a half-Westernized school system. Constant reprimands by his father at home and the liberal use of the long cane by the headmaster at school make life unbearable. The company of his friends, the walks to Sarayu with Mani and Rajam, and talking to granny on all possible subjects give him some relief. Through small but vivid details an intimate picture of the two aspects of the young

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 213.

boy's life is given. The adult control on this world of childhood is very rigid, but young Swami has devised his own ways. It is his father's definite order that he is not to roam about in the afternoons but has to stay at home and do his school work. These orders are obeyed to the last word but only in the presence of his father. As soon as his father crosses the street corner, Swami can afford to take every risk. With great ease and confidence he can start on his afternoon tours. What can the mother do? She can be easily convinced that the drawing master wants to see him immediately.

Sometimes, young Swami has to face very peculiar problems such as, how to entertain Rajam, the son of a police officer. He does not have a room of his own. His "room" consists of an old table in one of the corners of his father's dressing room. There too everything is in hopeless disorder, and there is a friend to be entertained. Borrowing his father's study room for a while may solve the problem, but how is he going to tell granny that she is not to call him or try to talk to him in the presence of his friend? Granny is old and, in the opinion of Swami, not very presentable. If only she could sleep at the right time, everything could be made all right. After all, he thinks, it is infinitely safer to show a sleeping granny to one's friends. But to Swami's horror, Granny is not only awake, she even asks Rajam to come near her and explains that being old and blind she can see very little

from a distance. For poor Swami this is nothing short of a big catastrophe. What would Rajam, the son of a big police officer, think of it? After all it is not very decent to have an old and blind grandmother!

Such incidents add to our understanding of this fascinating little world of which Swami, Rajam, and Mani are the principal actors. Swami is mediocre and timid but has the privilege of having some very distinguished boys as his friends. Rajam is the one who has everything and knows everything. Naturally, he rules over this little kingdom like a deity. Mani, the big bully who is the leader of the gang, is a perfect rogue. Wearing his cap at an angle and a Tamil novel under his arm he has been coming to school ever since the old school peon can remember. His pair of heavy wooden clubs can really create wonders--nobody dare oppose him. Samuel the Pea is like a tail of this group. There is nothing outstanding about him except his size which is as short as a pea. He and Swami have one thing in common; it is their laughter.

Into this world of Swami and Company are introduced the jarring notes of adult control. The grown-ups are over-imposing and often forget that once they too were children. Swami's father appears to be a little oppressive, although whatever he does is for the good of the child.

Chandran, the hero of The Bachelor of Arts, is young Swami

grown up. The basic nature of the problems of the two characters remains the same. Here again there is the question of the rigid parental control. Compared with Swami, Chandran enjoys more freedom in his daily routine of life. It is natural and understandable. Chandran, after all, is a college student. Once in a while, though against the wishes of his father, he can go to a late movie show. But when it comes to the question of big decisions of life, marriage, for instance, he is supposed to conform to the traditional pattern, i.e., to marry the girl his parents select for him. Chandran has, however, his own plans. He is attracted by a girl whom he cannot marry because their horoscopes are not auspicious. This upsets him so much that he leaves his house and becomes a sanyāsi. But this proves to be another illusion. He comes back to normal, marries a beautiful girl selected by his mother, and leads a happy life.

Chandran does not grow in the sense that Krishna of Grateful to Life and Death does. In fact, he does not have enough scope to grow. He is limited by his own nature, his indecisions. In the novel there are several occasions which demand a decision from him. First of all, there is the question of his career. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree, he cannot decide what he wants to do. When he is pestered enough with enquiries and suggestions from his various relatives and friends, he feels a vague desire to go to England to do something there.

What he is going to do there he does not know.

Next, there arises the question of his marriage. He wants to marry a girl he thinks he loves. His mother, however, has her own plans for his marrying into a rich and cultured family, a family with a "status." Chandran has broken almost halfway from the traditions of his society. But he does not have the courage to break away completely and marry the girl he is in love with. His decision to become a sanyāsi is dictated by his need to escape from everything that reminds him of his once-loved-and-lost girl. It takes him some time to realise that he has definitely left his house:

Now what did it matter where he lived? He was like a sanyāsi. Why "like"? He was a sanyāsi; the simplest solution. Shave the head, dye the clothes in ochre, and you were dead for aught the world cared. The only thing possible; short of committing suicide, there was no other way out. He had done with the gamble of life. He was beaten. He could not go on living, probably for sixty years more, with people and friends and parents, with Malathi married and gone.⁴⁹

This is how he becomes a sanyāsi--drifted by the currents, uprooted by the storm, left neither with the will to live nor the will to die. He is afraid of both of these possibilities:

Others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose. Renunciation may be to them a means to attain peace or may be peace itself. They are perhaps dead in time, but they do live in eternity. But Chandran's renunciation was not of that

⁴⁹The Bachelor of Arts, p. 102.

kind. It was an alternative to suicide. Suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma. Perhaps he lacked the barest physical courage that was necessary for it.... His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny.⁵⁰

A few months of a sanyāsi's life are enough to bring Chandran back to his senses again. After a great deal of remorse and reflection he realises that his "love" for Malathi had been a "silly infatuation." So, why should one be a deserter and a counterfeit? Once he is back in Malgudi, everything is bound to be all right. The happy ending with which the story of the Bachelor of Arts ends is, after all, quite in line with his character.

As far as complexity and development are concerned, Margayya and Raju are the most complex characters. In them Narayan has been able to give full-length character studies. Margayya, as his very name suggests, shows the way out to those in financial troubles. His emergence is "an unexpected and incalculable offshoot of a co-operator's zeal."⁵¹ His office is under the banyan tree. "His tin box, a grey, discolored, knobby affair,"⁵² small enough to be carried under the arms, contains practically his entire equipment. For the

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 108.

⁵¹The Financial Expert, p. 1.

⁵²Ibid., p. 2.

villagers he is a wizard who can help them in drawing unlimited loans from the Co-operative Bank. The Financial Expert is the story of the rise and fall of Margayya's fortune. The plot of the novel tends to be a little farcical, but the all-absorbing character of the hero gives it vitality. It depicts "a delicate and an acute psychological study of Margayya's inner confusion, the tragedy of his relationship with his beloved and badly spoiled only son and his life-long quarrel with his brother."⁵³

It is not possible to reduce Margayya's character to a formula. He is too complex for that. He is cautious, shrewd, evasive, superstitious, ambitious, and self-confident. He can be eloquent whenever he likes. One subject which inspires him tremendously is money. Money is the thing in life, he knows it well. This realization has come to him through suffering and humiliation:

Money is the greatest factor in life and the most ill-used. People don't know how to tend it, how to manure it, how to water it, how to make it grow, and when to pluck its flowers and when to pluck its fruits. What most people now do is to try and eat the plant itself.⁵⁴

This statement sums up practically the whole of the philosophy of the financial wizard. This is his most strongly asserted conviction which

⁵³The New Yorker, April 25, 1953, p. 129.

⁵⁴The Financial Expert, p. 132.

carries the weight of his personal experiences.

One thing which creates confusion in the mind of Margayya (as well as of the readers) is his two-fold loyalty to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and the idea that man makes his own destiny. He starts (rather, re-starts) his career with a forty-day worship of Lakshmi. This is done in the proper manner after consulting the priest who makes elaborate calculations about the horoscope. Money comes to him in the form of a manuscript, "Bed Life," written by Dr. Pal. Whether this is the result of the propitiation of the goddess Lakshmi or a friendly gesture of Dr. Pal is an open question. A great deal can be said on both sides. But what use can it be for Margayya to indulge himself in useless speculations? He is a practical man with a hundred per cent business sense. What is important for him is how to cultivate the money, "how to tend it, to manure it, to water it, and to make it grow."

But at the end of Book IV we nervously find the financial wizard striding on a new line of thought. Although he himself is not very sure of the line of thought he is pursuing, he no longer believes that man is a victim of circumstances or fate. Man can make his own future and present, he feels, provided he works hard and remains watchful:

The gold bars in the safe at home and the cash bundles and the bank pass-book are not sent down from heaven--they are a result of my own application. I need not have stayed at my desk for ten hours at a stretch and talked myself hoarse

to all those clients of mine and taken all that risk on half-secured loans!... I could just have sat back and lost myself in contemplation--"55

But immediately he realises that it is not always safe to think so and adds, "Of course Goddess Lakshmi or another will have to be propitiated from time to time."56

This seems to be a very confusing philosophy. But it is so. This is exactly what the reviewer means by the "inner confusion" of Margayya.

Next to money the other thought which weighs heavy on his mind is that of his completely spoiled son Balu. All his life Margayya has nourished big dreams about Balu's future--dreams which never come true. Balu grows before us from a little boy who insists every day on buying an elephant to Balu, the grown-up man, the father of a son. The whole book is as much a study of Balu's growth as of Margayya's mind perceiving this growth. Margayya himself is to a very large extent responsible for what Balu turns out to be. The study of this father-son relationship is interesting and illuminating.

The strange irony of Margayya's destiny is that his own darling Balu becomes the immediate cause of his ruin. It is quite amazing how Margayya survives this terrible crash. At the end of the novel we see him advising his son to make a start again:

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 185-86.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 186.

"You see that box there. I have managed to get it out again." He pointed to a corner where his old knobby trunk was kept. "Its contents are intact as I left them years ago--a pen and an ink bottle. You asked for my property. There it is, take it: have an early meal tomorrow and go to the banyan tree in front of the Co-operative Bank. I hope the tree is still there. Go there, that is all I can say: and anything may happen thereafter. Well, what do you say? I am showing you a way. Will you follow it?"

The boy stood ruminating. He was looking crushed: "How can I go and sit there? What will people think?"

"Very well then, if you are not going, I am going on with it as soon as I am able to leave this bed," said Margayya.

"Now get the youngster here. I will play with him. Life has been too dull without him in this house." ⁵⁷

This is Margayya, more triumphant than crushed.

In some ways Raju is even more complex than Margayya. "He has the propensity to bland dishonesty and the credulity which often goes with craftiness leading to eventual victimization which characterized The Financial Expert and Mr. Sampath." ⁵⁸ He plays the role which he has assumed, or rather which people like Velan have given him, very skilfully. Once out of prison he has nowhere to go. To make a living out of hard work is not possible for him, for he had never done that before. Moreover, in the new role of a holy man he is getting food without begging. The only thing he has to do is to cultivate caution. He is expected to advise the villagers on every problem--not a hard job. After all, he had been a

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 218.

⁵⁸The Times Literary Supplement, May 9, 1958, p. 254.

tourist once. The old stories of gods and goddesses which his mother used to tell him when he was a little boy, the stories which he can remember only in fragments, help him a great deal. It does not matter whether the stories are complete or not; one thing they must have is a moral--an obvious moral. The following excerpt illustrates his "method":

He began narrating the story of Devaka, a man of ancient times who begged for alms at the temple gate every day and would not use any of his collections without first putting them at the feet of the god. Halfway through the story he realized that he could not remember either its course or its purport. He lapsed into silence. Velan patiently waited for the continuation. He was of the stuff disciples are made of; an unfinished story or an incomplete moral never bothered him; it was all in the scheme of life.⁵⁹

Raju's "scheme of life" is disturbed by the severe drought that the villages are facing. He has to undertake a twelve-day fast (which is imposed upon him because of some misinterpretation) so that the rains may come. The attempt costs him his life; he dies a martyred-saint.

Such is the story of the "reluctant holy man." The past of this "dreaming scamp" is revealed through flashbacks. In these flashbacks he is his own narrator. In the words of the reviewer Donald Barr, it is "a curiously braided time sequence."⁶⁰ The time sequence is managed very well, and it helps in bringing several aspects of Raju's life to light.

⁵⁹The Guide, p. 15.

⁶⁰The New York Times Book Review, March 23, 1958, p. 5.

The development of his character from a railroad-station food vendor to a holy man is well-marked. His interest in guiding the tourists causes him to become involved in the affairs of Rosie, of whom later on he becomes a lover as well as an "impresario." Raju lacks the tenderness of Margayya, the sincerity of Sampath, and the honesty of Srinivas. He is "the prototype of Mr. Narayan's conception of human fallibility."⁶¹

In Ramani, the haughty and autocratic husband of The Dark Room,⁶² Narayan is at his poorest. Ramani is always in bad temper (except when he is making love to Shanta Bai, his secretary). He is not only a harsh husband but an extremely inconsiderate, rather cruel father. He lacks "the humanities of heart."⁶³ The scene, when Savitri, his wife, is leaving the house for Sarayu in the dead of night because her life has become unbearable and Ramani shuts the door on her, is cruel and heart-breaking. His love-affair with Shanta Bai is ridiculous, though not impossible. Shanta Bai herself is Narayan's own idea of creating a character out of vacuum and then using it either to tie the knots of the plot or to open them. Even with all her stories about her past, she is hardly believable. At best the major characters of The Dark Room

⁶¹The Times Literary Supplement, May 9, 1958, p. 254.

⁶²The Dark Room, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1938).

⁶³Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 27.

are sticks, almost one-dimensional. The minor characters fare much better. The servants running from the kitchen to the garage door, Savitri's two most intimate friends who are not even on speaking terms with each other are not bad; at least one can laugh at them.

Some of Narayan's minor characters are no more than mere caricatures. They are perfectly flat, conceived in the spirit of "I shall never desert Mr. Micawber." Veeraswami (The Bachelor of Arts), Marco (The Guide), and Mr. Ebenzar (Swami and Friends) are some of the flat characters. Veeraswami, a "dark, stocky person" is all for anti-imperialism. When Chandran is the secretary of the Historical Association of his college, Veeraswami reads a fiery paper, "The Aids to British Expansion in India." It creates unnecessary trouble for the secretary. A "note" from Principal Brown is received asking Chandran to send each paper to his office before it is read in the meeting of the Association. Veeraswami has another paper entitled "The Subtleties of Imperialism," which through Chandran's caution is never read. In his words, "Veeraswami bristled with prejudices and violence. Imperialism was his favorite demon. He believed in smuggling arms into the country, and, on a given day, shooting all the Englishmen."⁶⁴

A year later when Chandran tells him that he is going to England,

⁶⁴The Bachelor of Arts, p. 46.

Veeraswami immediately flares up. For this shoot-all-the-Englishmen type of patriot there is nothing more shameful than this proposal of Chandran. Veeraswami is a man of plans. He has plans for solving the food problem of the country, plans of nature-cure to fight the British drug manufacturers, and even plans for shooting the Britishers. He starts a movement called the Resurrection Brigade. This Brigade is "only an attempt to prepare the country for a revolution."⁶⁵ Although he has plans for securing a membership of fifty thousand in South India alone, the actual membership of the Brigade, unfortunately, never goes beyond twenty-five.

Marco, the research scholar in The Guide, is another character who is constructed around a single idea. He is writing a book on the ancient culture of South India. He has his own interpretations about the sculpture of the temples of the twelfth century. In connection with his field work he visits the Iswara temple in the Malgudi district. Marco has married Rosie, who belongs to the Devadasi caste.⁶⁶ She is beautiful and educated, and the dominant passion of her life is dancing. Marco hates dancing; for him it is "street acrobatics." They are extremely ill-fit for each other. Marco has obviously made a bad choice in Rosie:

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 63.

⁶⁶The term Devadasi literally means "girls who serve gods." In its historical context, it refers to the dancing girls associated with

Marco was just impractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them. His mind was completely in it. All practical affairs of life seemed impossible to him; such a simple matter as finding food or shelter or buying a railway ticket seemed to him a monumental job. Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong--this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one.⁶⁷

Raju enters their life and complicates the matters still more.

Neglected by her husband, Rosie is attracted towards Raju. Marco gets suspicious of their relation. He tortures her and then abandons her.

This is just a framework for the rise of Rosie as a dancer and her accepting life with Raju. The impression that one gets of Marco's character is that he is heartless, inhuman, selfish, completely devoid of any sympathy and good feelings. The way he treats his wife in Mempi

temples. The custom came into vogue about 3rd century A.D., for Kālidāsa refers to dancing girls present in Mahākālā temple of Ujjayini in Meghadūta. By 6th century A.D. this practice had become very popular. It had the general support of kings and aristocracy. Since it tended to lower the moral and spiritual atmosphere of temples, the puritanical section of Brahmanas and the Ascetics vehemently opposed it. This practice has been legally prohibited throughout India since it signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in 1921. Socially the status of devadāsīs has always been very inferior. They cannot marry, since they are for all their lives married to the gods. For historical details see, A. S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization (Benares: Motilal Benarsidas, 1956).

⁶⁷The Guide, p. 99.

Peak House and subsequently at Malgudi Railway Station can hardly be justified. There appears to be something sinister about his character. This quality, however, is not consistent. The result is that it is hard to feel convinced of the reality of all his actions. His character suffers from lack of dimensions. There is practically no scope given to it to develop. He can be termed a "functional" character. He exists mainly for the sake of the plot, which is rather too neatly contrived. There, too, his character has another limitation. The technique of the novel is such that he is directly controlled by Raju, the narrator of the story. The facts are likely to be distorted in such a narration. It is very possible that Raju is bringing out only those facts which are favorable to him and concealing others. Raju's point of view, the only one that we have, is not very reliable.

Ebenazar, the scripture teacher in Swami and Friends, is a pure and simple caricature. He is a typical fanatical religious preacher. But in Narayan's presentation of Ebenazar there is very little of bitterness. After one has seen his performance of smashing Bhagavad Gita, one does not think him anything but theatrical and funny.

The headmaster of the Board High School (Swami and Friends) is another attempt at caricature. There can be perhaps nothing more

funny than the following picture of this formidable headmaster in his office:

The Head Master was sleeping with his head between his hands and his elbows resting on the table. It was a small stuffy room with only one window opening on the weather-beaten side-wall of a shop; it was cluttered with dust-laden rolls of maps globes, and geometrical squares. The Head Master's white cane lay on the table across two ink-bottles and some pads. The sun came in a hot dusty beam and fell on the Head Master's nose and the table. He was gently snoring. This was a possibility that Rajam had not thought of.

"What shall we do?" Swaminathan asked in a rasping whisper.

"Wait," Rajam ordered.

They waited for ten minutes and then began to make gentle noises with their feet. The Head Master opened his eyes and without taking his head from his hands, kept staring at them vacantly, without showing any sign of recognition. He rubbed his eyes, raised his eyebrows three times, yawned, and asked in a voice thick with sleep, "Have you fellows no class?" He fumbled for his spectacles and put them on. Now the picture was complete--wizened face and dingy spectacles calculated to strike terror into the hearts of Swaminathans.⁶⁸

This portrait is almost Dickensian.

Of all the minor characters, the old landlord of Srinivas is the most interesting one. He is almost like a background, a kind of chorus to the life of Anderson Lane. Through him Narayan can voice the regret of the older generation for the days past when one could buy twenty towels of Malayalam variety for a rupee. Through him Narayan very ably satirises the institution of faked sanyāsis. Most of the time he

⁶⁸Swami and Friends, pp. 133-34.

can be identified with his own formula, "Don't drive nails into my walls." But in his make-up there is something more than that. He is shrewd, hypocritical, cunning, selfish, and miserly. He is extremely fond of talking but has few people to talk to. He can quote Scriptures even for trivial things with great ease. His children do not care for him, nor does he care for them. He lives quite a lonely life.

The only attachment that the old man feels is for his granddaughter with whose parents he is not even on speaking terms. He wishes to see her well married. It is for her that he has set apart five thousand rupees as a dowry to be given in her marriage.

He claims that he is a sanyāsi--detached from every worldly interest. It is only when he visits Srinivas's house, rather too frequently, that we know what kind of a sanyāsi he is. Once Srinivas invites him to have coffee and tiffin with him, he is simply overjoyed:

He nearly became incoherent with joy. He was torn between the attraction of the offer and shyness. For the first time Srinivas observed that the man could be moved by shyness. "No, no, I never eat anywhere. Oh, don't trouble yourself about it.... No, no..." he said, but all the same got up and followed Srinivas into the kitchen.... She then served a couple of cakes on each leaf, and the old man rubbed his hands with the joy of anticipation. At a signal from Srinivas he fell to; and Srinivas wondered how long it was since the other had any food. "What do you eat at nights?" he asked testingly. The old man tore off a piece of cake and stuffed it in his mouth and swallowed it before he answered, shaking his head....

"I'm a Sanyāsi, my dear young man--and no true Sanyāsi should eat more than once a day." ⁶⁹

The end of this sanyasi is unexpected and mysterious. It seems Narayan cannot decide what to do with him, so he devises this kind of death for him.

Demello of Hollywood is another very delightful minor character. He is the brain behind the studio organization of Sunrise Pictures. He calls himself C. E., and labels all the others with a variety of big names. Everybody feels overawed by his technical knowledge. In addition to the technical knowhow Demello possesses other vivid earmarks of the successful caricature. An entirely new phraseology is one of them. "Conference" is the most popular of these terms. "No two persons met nowadays except in a conference. No talk was possible unless it were a discussion. There were story conferences and allied discussions. Lesser persons would probably call them by simpler names, but it seemed clear that in the world of films an esoteric idiom of its own was indispensable for its dignity and development."⁷⁰ Narayan is slightly ironical in his approach towards this representative of the West.

The women characters in the Malgudi novels probably need a separate consideration. In general they do not play very important roles. Rosie (The Guide), Sushila (Grateful to Life and Death), and

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 115-16.

Bharati (Waiting for the Mahatma) are exceptions. They all play very important roles. They are indispensable for their plots. They could never possibly be confused with each other. The impression that they leave on the mind of the reader is not blurred. All the rest of the women characters--Raju's mother, Sampath's wife, Swami's mother, Srinivas's wife--play very minor roles. They could be easily replaced by each other. For example, it hardly makes any difference if Swami's mother is put in the place of Chandran's mother. Margayya's wife and Raju's mother can scarcely be distinguished from each other. Narayan does not give them even a name. They are either somebody's mother or wife, and as such they are known throughout. They all belong to a type--that of the good housewife. They are drawn, no doubt, with utmost sympathy, but their scope is so limited that nothing more can be done with them. The portrayal of the two grandmothers--Raju's and Swami's--is excellent. In them Narayan has been able to achieve maximum effect with minimum effort.

When compared with Sushila and Bharati, Rosie appears to be pale and shadowy. One reason for this is that she gets lost in the exigencies of the plot. She does not possess enough individuality to rise above the formal framework. She is tender, beautiful, and artistic, but still she hardly comes to life. At times she gives the impression that she is an abstraction, merely an instrument for alluring

Raju. She has a very unconventional background. She was born into a Devadāsi family. Despite the lowness of her rank, her mother sent her to college to get a higher education. After securing a Master's degree in Economics, she marries an academician who loves his books more than his wife. When the rift between them becomes wider, she leaves him (rather she is left by him) and starts living with Raju without ever marrying him. Raju had earlier promised to provide her the opportunity of developing her art. This promise leads her to disregard all the traditions and conventions of her society.

Raju's mother leaves the house and goes away to live with her brother in the village. She had been raised on different ideas, on a different set of values. She cannot conceive of living in the same house with his son and an unknown girl of an unknown caste who has left her husband.

The circumstances under which Raju's mother has to leave her own ancestral house have hardly any effect on Rosie. She acts like a machine, a dancing machine. She is totally unconcerned with public opinion. Narayan is not very explicit about the reaction of the people of Malgudi to such a relationship, but it is certain that Malgudi, orthodox and old-fashioned as it is, could never have approved of the arrangement. One really wonders how Rosie herself, young, intelligent, and highly educated as she is, could have accepted the situation so

complacently.

The most important factor which influences the presentation of Rosie's character strongly is the point of view which the author uses. Over the parts of the book which deal with Raju's life as a sanyāsi Narayan has direct control. He narrates the story from the omniscient point of view. In the rest of the book he gives Raju complete liberty to interpret and narrate his past. "He" becomes "I," and this "I" is Raju himself. The author does not step in to tell where Raju is wrong or prejudiced. The result is that our knowledge of Rosie (and Marco, too) is limited. We know only as much as Raju's unconscious mind can permit him to relate. Rosie's reactions, feelings, and sentiments are not given free expression. Consequently, the total impression of her character remains vague, and one hardly gets the feeling that she is taken from life. At best, she remains a shadow of a shadow.

Sushila, the wife of the English teacher in Grateful to Life and Death, is one of the best full-length character studies. The book has a well-marked autobiographical strain. Narayan's wife died in 1939, leaving a three-year-old daughter. Like Krishna, the hero, Narayan, too, shortly after this catastrophe resigned the teaching position that he had in a college. Since then he has devoted his life to the upbringing of his daughter and the writing of short stories and novels.

Although the pattern of Krishna's life has many striking

resemblances to that of the author, Grateful to Life and Death is not Narayan's autobiography. It is first and foremost a work of fiction. Krishna could be like Narayan, but he is not Narayan. "The writer," says Somerset Maugham, "does not copy his originals; he takes what he wants from them, a few traits that have caught his attention, a turn of mind that has fired his imagination, and therefrom constructs his character. He is not concerned whether it is a truthful likeness; he is concerned only to create a plausible harmony ~~convenient~~ for his own purposes."⁷¹ In creating Krishna and Sushila Narayan might have drawn from incidents of his own personal life. But it is not the "truthful ~~like-~~ness" that he is trying to achieve. If it were so, the scope and the perspective of the book would have been entirely different.

The picture of Sushila, ever fresh and beautiful, clad in her indigo-colored silk saree, vibrates with life. There is nothing sensational about her; in her attitudes and beliefs she is a typical Indian girl. An excellent house manager, she makes the list of monthly requirements with great precision and is immensely proud of this ability. Small details like the following are not only interesting in themselves but they help also in understanding Sushila's character:

⁷¹The Summing Up. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 57.

She watched the containers as a sort of barometer, the level of their contents indicating the progress of the month. Each had to be at a particular level on a particular date; and on the last date of the month--just enough for another day, when they would be replenished. She watched these with a keen eye like a technician watching an all-important meter at a power house.⁷²

Or, again,

There on a pedestal she kept a few silver images of gods, and covered them with flowers; two small lamps were lit before them every morning. I often saw her standing there with the light in her face, her eyes closed and her lips lightly moving. I was usually amused to see her thus, and often asked what exactly it was that she repeated before her gods. She never answered this question. To this day I have never learnt what magical words she uttered there with closed eyes. Even when I mildly joked about it, "Oh! becoming a yogi!" she never tried to defend herself, but merely treated my references with the utmost indifference. She seemed to have a deep secret life.⁷³

Through incidents like these we get to know Sushila more intimately. In a quiet way these create an atmosphere of peace, domesticity, faith, love, and harmony. Unfortunately, the harmony of such a life is destroyed by Sushila's illness. After suffering for a few weeks she dies. Her death is described with great restraint. The silent suffering, the poignancy, and the pathos are extremely moving.

Sushila's death closes one chapter of Krishna's life, but it opens another. Although she is not physically present in the rest of the book,

⁷²Grateful to Life and Death, pp. 42-43.

⁷³Ibid., p. 37.

her spirit hovers over it, both literally and psychologically. One day Krishna receives a message from an unknown person that the spirit of his dead wife wishes to communicate with him. This gives Krishna a new lease on life. He tries his best to establish communication in the way he is directed, and "when the boundaries of the two personalities are suddenly dissolved," he feels a rare peace, solace, and joy.

Narayan has handled here a very delicate subject. Halfway through the novel the action is partly transferred to a realm where physical existence is of no importance. Surprisingly enough, no ghosts are seen; no doors are banged; no hinges creak. Nothing like that happens; the action moves on quite another level. Sushila (a spirit herself) with the help of a band of other spirits communicates with her husband through a particular medium. "It is an attempt," as one of the spirits puts it, "to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called Death."⁷⁴ The spirit of Sushila keeps a constant watch over her husband and child. She can see everything, know everything--even the inmost thoughts of her husband--and remember everything. "She is able to see things far more clearly than when she was on earth,"⁷⁵ says a helper spirit. The best results in communication, they tell, depend

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 131.

upon the mental state of the medium. The medium, too, can be eliminated, but the elimination depends upon the psychic development. This is what Sushila asks her husband to do.

Such is the material on which Narayan has raised the structure of Grateful to Life and Death. The question to be considered is not whether such a thing could happen or not, but how far it does influence the plot, the characterization, and the rhythm of the novel. To put it in simpler terms: is it convincingly written? Or do we feel cheated at the end of the novel? As far as the "How" and "Why" are concerned, it is impossible to give a rational and scientific explanation for such a phenomenon as direct communication with the spirit of a dead person. Such an explanation is neither sought nor given. Krishna may be actually having communication with the spirit of his wife, or possibly he is having hallucinations.

As a matter of fact, the whole novel is written with so much sincerity and intensity that while reading it we forget that the author is writing about an impossible and fantastic subject. Rather, we feel as if it might have really happened. No wonder, Margaret Parton finds the last part of the book quite convincing.⁷⁶ The novelist has, of course, no deliberate intention of making the reader convinced of the authenticity

⁷⁶New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Nov. 29, 1953, p. 7.

of this experience. No arguments are given; no problems are posed. What is significant is the light that it throws on the intensity of personal relationships. The feeling that perhaps it was all predestined is there in the background. This is what J. P. Muhel means when he says, "There is a brooding awareness of fate which makes the story seem not authored but merely transcribed."⁷⁷

Bharati has the same charm and tenderness that Sushila has, but she is devoted to a different cause. Her father died in the 1920 political movement. Some years later her mother also died, leaving young Bharati alone. It is then that Mahatma Gandhi adopts her as his own daughter. Living with her godfather and his many associates, she has seen practically the whole of the country. Trained in the ideals of truth and non-violence, she knows what her country needs. Since she has spent all her life in ashrams, her orientation is definitely different from that of, say, Sushila or Malathi or Rosie. She is a soldier in the struggle of the country for independence. There is an ideal before her. The spirit of obedience, discipline, duty, and self-control that we find in her character is the result of her early training. The interest of the reader, however, does not lie so much in her life as a political worker as in her femininity, tenderness, and emotional sympathy. She is

⁷⁷Saturday Review, Oct. 31, 1953, pp. 22-23.

beautiful, slender, and young, with eyes that sparkle with happiness. The first time Sriram happens to see her, he is startled by her beauty. As a boy, he had adored the portrait of a European queen with apple cheeks and wavy coiffure which he had seen hanging in the little shop opposite his house. But Bharati was different: "She looked so different from the beauty in Kanni's shop; his critical faculties were at once alert, and he realized how shallow was the other beauty, the European queen, and he wondered that he had ever given her a thought. He wouldn't look at the picture again even if Kanni should give it to him free."⁷⁸

At times, Bharati seems to be an idealized figure. Perhaps this is because of her extraordinary background. She appears to be different from a Kamla, a Vimla or a Malathi because she is different.

We get hardly any glimpse of her private life because she does not have any. Nor do we feel that she has very strong private sentiments. Even so personal a matter as her marriage she leaves completely to the decision of Mahatma Gandhi. Indeed, without Mahatma's sanction she cannot think of doing anything. It is but natural that we do not feel as near to her as we do to Sushila. We never enter into her mind, her feelings. The portrayal suffers from a lack of emotional warmth. Of course, she is not cold, but she is not spontaneous either. Her life is not entirely her own. The country has need of her.

⁷⁸Waiting for the Mahatma, p. 19.

An important aspect of the craft of a novelist is the way in which he makes use of his tools: people, situations, background, and action. In Narayan's case it is hard to make a generalization about this aspect of his work. The creation of a character is not solving a geometry problem, where everything is definite and accurate. If three sides of a triangle are equal, the angles of such a triangle are bound to be equal. Not so with a novel. In it the human element is the most unpredictable, indefinite one. We do not live our lives according to preconceived theories and principles. On the contrary, most of the time our actions are governed by oddities, whims, and other stray fancies. Something strikes our mind, and we make a change in the entire course of our life. But there are limits within which these caprices can possibly work. We often hear people saying, "I bet such a person as he is can never do that." It is equally true of fictional characters. A novel whose chief character (or characters) is not convincing obviously fails to reach its goal.

A character in fiction (like a real person in life) is governed by his own nature, attitudes, and beliefs. The element of surprise cannot be totally eliminated, but a character based entirely on the principle of "giving surprise" has very little chance of survival. We do not delight in all the impossible things that a particular character may do but in all the possible ones that he does. A successful character acts from what one may call the center of his being. He may

be weak or strong, good or bad: whatever he is, he must remain true to himself.

When for the sake of the story Thackeray tells a lie about Becky, we know he is telling a lie and is only trying to blacken her character. She could not and would not have murdered Josh. And he tells a lie about Major Pendennis, too. The ~~major~~ is too honorable to have indulged in blackmail. He is a worldly old gentleman but incapable of real wickedness. If Narayan were to come and tell us that Srinivas has been arrested for fraud and embezzlement, we would have exclaimed "Oh! No! It can not be true." We know that Narayan would be telling a lie in that case and that Srinivas is too honest, sincere, and simple to do anything like that. Or, if halfway through Grateful to Life and Death he told us that Krishna two weeks after Sushila's death married again, what would be our reaction? We would certainly resent strongly such a violation of credibility on the part of the author. Once a character has been "established" and life infused into him, there is nothing much left to depend upon the discretion of the author. He cannot "play" with his "breathing men and women." He can watch them; he can feel their logical reactions; but he cannot make them do what he desires.

To the question of the "rights" of a character is joined another big question--the control that an author exercises on his characters.

When Christopher Isherwood writes, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully fixed, printed,⁷⁹ he is not expressing the whole truth. A novelist is neither a camera nor a photographer. A camera with its shutter open cannot by itself make beautiful pictures. Someone has very carefully to compose the view, fix the range, i.e., make a selection.

To extend the analogy still further, the same is true of a novelist. He is not just a camera plus a tape recorder. He has to compose the view and fix the range. He needs to select, and this selection is governed by certain principles for certain effects. For example, in the Malgudi novels Narayan leaves out the political beliefs of his characters but puts in the religious attitudes. This selection obviously implies control which may in its turn be influenced by various other factors such as, the vision, range, and purpose of the novelist. How much control does Narayan have over his characters? How much freedom does he give them? Are his characters like Moll Flanders or like Elizabeth Bennet, Emma, or Madam Bovary? "Moll Flanders is like a tree in a park so that we can see her from every aspect and are not

⁷⁹Goodbye to Berlin (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 13.

bothered by rival growths."⁸⁰ In *Moll Flanders* Moll is everything and is given the maximum freedom.

In *Malgudi* there are no *Moll Flanders*. Such a statement does not imply any moral point of view. *Malgudi* is, by no means, the city of saints. It is the city of real people, "breathing men and women." The question here is of heavy centering and perfect freedom of action of the characters. The characters in *Malgudi* do not appear to run away from the control of Narayan as *Moll Flanders* does from Defoe.

Jane Austen's characters stay within their limits. An Eleanor is Eleanor, and a Marianne, Marianne. There is a harmony between their actions and their temperaments. So it is with Narayan's characters. Sriram does not elope with Bharati, because he can not. If he had done it, it would have been a "dirty trick" played by the author.

Anthony Trollope in his autobiography says:

To a novelist it becomes a matter of deep conscience how he shall handle those characters by whose words and doings he hopes to interest his readers. It will very frequently be the case that he will be tempted to sacrifice something for effect, to say a word or two here, or to draw a picture there, for which he feels he has the power, and which when spoken or drawn would be alluring. The regions of absolute vice are foul and odious. The savour of them, till custom has hardened the palate and the nose, is disgusting. In these he will hardly tread. But there are outskirts on these regions on which sweet-smelling flowers seem to grow, and grass to be green. It is in these borderlands that the danger lies.⁸¹

⁸⁰E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1928), p. 87.

⁸¹An Autobiography (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927), p. 192.

In Narayan there are neither the ever-growing "sweet-smelling flowers" nor the regions of "absolute vice." His characters are neither saints (Raju is a fake one) nor devils. They are ordinary, very ordinary men and women. There is nothing very sensational or heroic about them. A little more brightness would have made them too conspicuous for Malgudi. Like Arnold Bennett's characters in The Old Wives Tale they are there, because they have every right to be there. Sophia in the Rue de la Paix and the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin is as much out of place as Sriram is in Connaught Place, New Delhi.

To quote Trollope again:

It is so that I have lived my characters, and thence has come whatever success I have obtained. There is a gallery of them, and of all in that gallery I may say that I know the tone of the voice, and the colour of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man I could assert whether he would have said these or the other words; of every woman, whether she would then have smiled or frowned.⁸²

Narayan could have written the above passage, but perhaps he would have done so in a milder tone. A "granny" must be real to him; so would be Sampath. But we do not find any assertions. Trollope's control over his character is more definite. He can step in and take charge of the whole situation. Like a typical Victorian novelist he can virtually take the reader aside and tell him about some deep secret concerning his character. The moralist in him remains vigilant lest any of his

⁸²Ibid., p. 202.

characters indulge in some unwarranted excesses. He is like a presiding deity over his Barchester people. His presence is felt in almost every page. If Mr. Slope had married Eleanor Bold, "You, O reader, and I, and Eleanor's other friends would have received the story of such a winning with much disgust and disappointment."⁸³ This is Trollope, the typical Victorian novelist, explaining his characters, admonishing them, exercising complete control on their actions, thoughts, movements, and judgments, and reminding us on every second line that the figures who move in and out of his books are his own creations and the life that they possess is given by him. They appear to be real, and real they are but only in a qualified sense. The novelist's intrusion in the action breaks the illusion of life that he himself establishes.

Narayan's control over his characters is implicit. As an omniscient author, he is there watching the externals, observing them move, and even going into their inmost thoughts, but he does not intrude in the action. Thus, the illusion of art is preserved. Most of his novels have one central observer (not in the Jamesian sense of the term) over whose shoulders we watch the people and their doings. In The Printer of Malgudi it is the editor Srinivas through whom we read

⁸³Barchester Towers (London: The Zodiac Press, 1949), p. 229.

"the story of three minds and six wild universes."⁸⁴ We know the printer, Mr. Sampath and the clerk-cum-artist, Ravi, through Srinivas. Our knowledge of these characters is limited by what Srinivas observes and relates. There is a very complicated relationship in which all these three minds with their six wild universes are involved. Sampath dominates the rest, even our editor Srinivas. Ravi is too farcical to be entirely credible. The attempts to give his character tragic tone are not very successful. However, the fault does not lie in the central observer; the very scope and nature of Ravi's character is such that it lacks both breadth and depth.

Grateful to Life and Death is written in first person. The narrator and the hero being the same person, the control of the author is invested in the hero. The perspective is limited, but it suits the purpose of the story. One obvious result is a sense of immediacy which the first person point of view leads to. In Waiting for the Mahatma the author uses the omniscient point of view. Sriram is in the focus, but then there are many other details, political and social, which over-crowd the range and the perspective.

In The Guide Narayan has made a major experiment in the direction of author's control. The point of view (first person) of the major character

⁸⁴The New York Times Book Review, May 19, 1957, p. 4.

is used consistently in some parts of the book in drawing out his past life. There are, however, sudden shifts from the author's point of view to Raju's. They break the past from the present and thus make an artistic contrast between the Raju of "now" and of "then". But it is still doubtful whether the effects achieved by the experiment in form are worth the things sacrificed. Narayan himself realises his difficulty. At times it becomes a little clumsy, and the author's attempt to clarify matter by adding comments in parantheses are largely unsuccessful. On page 7, line 1, "My troubles would not have started but for Rosie...", it is not clear to whom Raju is saying all this. It seems as if he is thinking aloud and not addressing anybody in particular. In order to avoid this confusion Narayan adds a short paranthesis, and it reads like this, "My trouble would not have started (Raju said in the course of narrating his life-story to this man who was called Velan at a later stage) but for Rosie...." One thing is still not clear. Is Raju narrating his life-story to this man (the villager who is sitting on the lower step and has a problem) whom the author wants to call Velan at a later stage, now? This "now" here refers to the context of the previous paragraph on p. 6. The time scheme is hopelessly confused here. The paranthesis in question seems to be an afterthought.

The question of the "control" of the author over his characters is related to the equally important one of the authors perspective on his characters. How does he look at them? How does he bring them to live?

To express the alternatives in an oft-repeated phrasing: is his approach like Chaucer's towards the Wife of Bath or is it like Shakespeare's in Hamlet's soliloquies? In other words, are these characters visualised through their external attributes or through their inmost thoughts, feelings, and sentiments? In order to know a real person in life fully, one needs different perspectives, different close-ups. The way a person dresses, the choice of the color and the material of his clothes, the various gestures that he makes, and other habits and mannerisms are as important as knowing how he thinks, feels and acts. The same is true of a character (not a caricature) in fiction.

For a well-developed character the author has to combine various methods, though not in any fixed proportion. An examination of Narayan's characters shows that there is no fixed formula according to which they are created. All characters are not equally subtle, nor are they meant to be so. Srinivas is not conceived in the same way as Sriram is. Srinivas is a far superior piece of characterization. Sriram is comparatively flat. Narayan hardly ever gives full descriptions of the physiognomy of his people. He is specific only when it has some special significance or when the personality of the person is influenced by those specific details.

In general, we do not know whether a particular person in one of his novels is tall or short, fair or dark, dressed in gray trousers or white dhoti. Instead of giving accurate details, he does give an impression. This impression is not the novelist's but the reader's. It is not

imposed from outside but gathered through the interplay of the temperament of a particular character and outside factors. Whenever Narayan is critical of a situation or a character, his criticism is revealed in an off-hand sly remark. It never takes the form of long-winded discussion and heated arguments. No attempt is made to prove a thesis. It is exactly here that Narayan parts from Bennett with whom, otherwise, he has great affinity. His satire, too, is usually so much played down that it almost merges into humor.

One thing that strikes the readers of the Malgudi novels is the lack of any ambition on the part of the author to transmit judgments to us. Whatever judgments and values he has are implicit--a part of the life he chooses to depict. Donald Barr's comment which he made with a specific reference to The Guide holds equally true of all the rest of Narayan's novels:

His comedy--by juxtaposing dignities and indignities, mingling the noble and the ignoble, showing us how porous our souls are, so that purposes evaporate and circumstances leak in incessantly--makes judgment difficult. But in fact that is his judgment on human affairs. He too has values, but he does no violence to life.⁸⁵

There are no compartments in this life. Everything is so fused together--people, setting, atmosphere, attitudes, and beliefs--that sometimes it is hard to find out where his success lies. Perhaps it is in this very fusion, in creating the illusion of life, life as it is lived,

⁸⁵The New York Times Book Review, March 23, 1958, p. 5.

without idealising and falsifying it, that the secret of his art lies.

His people are part of the world to which they belong. There is that sense of belonging to a group, a caste, a piece of land, and a family.

Half of the effect of a good novel depends upon exposition. It may be interesting to consider how Narayan fares in his craft. A skilful novelist has to introduce his characters properly, establish them in life, and then expose them to the world around them without giving the impression that a superior figure is holding the strings tight. In order to be effective, exposition has to be short, dramatic and natural.

Undigested detailed topography when used as an introduction is a decided weakness. In The Old Wives Tale Bennett goes on for more than eight pages describing the topographical detail, beginning with latitude and longitude and ending with the description of the houses and the shops built in Bursley Square. Of course, this approach does not make the book a lesser work. The book remains a masterpiece in spite of it. Narayan's novels, on the other hand, begin with people; the topography is imperceptibly worked into the patterns of their lives.

Narayan is usually, though not always, interested in creating an impressive and meaningful exposition. Here is Raju, the reluctant holy man, drifting into the world of The Guide:

Raju welcomed the intrusion--something to relieve the loneliness of the place. The man stood gazing reverentially on his face. Raju felt amused and embarrassed. "Sit down if you like," Raju said, to break the spell. The other accepted the suggestion with a grateful nod and went down the river steps to wash his feet and face, came up wiping himself dry

with the end of a checkered yellow towel on his shoulder, and took his seat two steps below the granite slab on which Raju was sitting cross-legged as if it were a throne, beside an ancient shrine. The branches of the trees canopying the river course rustled and trembled with the agitation of birds and monkeys settling down for the night. Upstream beyond the hills the sun was setting. Raju waited for the other to say something. But he was too polite to open a conversation.⁸⁶

In these opening lines of The Guide Narayan has achieved much more than at first glance seems to be the case. He has been able to establish the physical background vividly: an ancient shrine with steps going down into the river canopied by trees on whose branches birds and monkeys take rest at night. In this set-up appear two persons, Raju sitting cross-legged on the granite slab, the villager standing a few steps down. Their reaction is also given. Raju likes the man because he had been very lonely; the man from the village gazes "reverentially." Why? Seeing Raju sitting cross-legged (that is the proper pose of a sanyāsi when he is meditating) near a temple, the villager has obviously taken him for a great holy man. Since Raju understands the cause of the "gaze", he is "amused and embarrassed." The time is sunset. It means the villager cannot stay for a long time. In a few minutes he will have to go so that he may reach his village before it is night. When invited by Raju to come near him and sit down, the villager first goes to the river, washes his feet and face and comes up. This little detail has

⁸⁶The Guide, p. 1.

significance in the sense that it shows one of the popular Hindu customs. Before entering a temple or sitting for meditation a Hindu always washes his face and feet. In other words, he purifies himself.

In less than a dozen lines Narayan establishes physical background, time, characters, their reactions and attitudes. The next question one would inevitably ask after reading it would be: What is this man Raju doing there? Who is he? and the story moves on.

Narayan's characters are not studied as a strange species but are well placed in a strong framework of social conventions. His attitude towards this framework is neither laudatory nor condemnatory. He just accepts it. He does not advocate any demolition. A passage like the following which ends Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable, could never have been written by Narayan:

Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges, and opportunities for every one. The Mahatma didn't say so, but the legal and sociological basis of caste having been broken down by the British, Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it--the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful member of a casteless and classless society.⁸⁷

⁸⁷Untouchable, p. 127.

Narayan is neither a social pathologist nor a religious reformer. He has detachment (not that of a sanyāsi), insight, and urbanity. Without actually sharing the life of his characters he has enough sympathy for them. It is through this insight and sympathy for customs, traditions, normal and easy way of life that he tries to get at "the hidden poetry and unrecognised pathos" of "the dull grey eyes and a voice of quite ordinary tone." His characters are not merely alive but very much alive. On the last page of the novel they vanish into life again.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE

Criticising the "droll and bemuddled" opposition between novels of character and novels of plot, Henry James says:

Character, in any sense in which we can get at it, is action, and action is plot, and any plot which hangs together, even if it pretend to interest us only in the fashion of a Chinese puzzle, plays upon our emotion, our suspense by means of personal references. We care what happens to people only in proportion as we know what people are.¹

Narayan's main interest lies in telling what his people are. What they do is the consequence of what they are. His plots do not fix his characters in the sense that those of Dickens do. To the contrary, Narayan's plots are determined by the inner nature of the characters portrayed. There is an air of ease and artlessness about the arrangement of his novels. It is the ease and artlessness of life itself.

¹Henry James, The House of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 95.

In general, the structure of Narayan's plot is loose, but his looseness is not the picaresque looseness of Smollett. However diverse the material may be, he puts it together with great skill. As a result, his plots usually, if not always, do not give the impression of diversity but of organic unity. This unity does not come so much from the outer framework as from the central character of the story. His plots are well-planned, though not always so carefully done as were Fielding's. Sometimes such incidents and situations are included in the plots which may not be necessary from the structural point of view, but their significance for the light they throw on the inner life of the characters, the sense of reality they evoke, the extra dimension they provide, can hardly be minimised.

Narayan cannot be called an expert craftsman, but he has a penetrating eye on the texture of life. He knows his Sampaths and Chandrans from close observation. He seems to have "lived with them in the full reality of the established intimacy."² He knows well what moves his people can or can not take. He does not have to dictate or transplant them. Nor does he have to sacrifice them to the necessities of plot. Without imposing any limitations, he recognizes their rights as characters. His plots lack the architectonic skill of Henry James,

²Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography, p. 202.

the sweep of Alexander Dumas, the perfection of Henry Fielding, the richness of Walter Scott, and the compactness of Charles Dickens. What they do have is an intimate, warm, sincere, and sure sense of life--life as lived in Malgudi.

Plot in the sense of some dramatic clash of events is almost absent in Narayan's novels. Nor do we have arbitrarily imposed entanglements and spacious frameworks in which the characters have the freedom to develop only up to that point when the superior judgment of the novelist comes in to pronounce the verdict on their fate. Quietly Narayan watches his characters, lets them grow and establish their reality. The story grows out of this reality. What Edith Wharton said of Jane Austen is equally true of Narayan:

...they evolve as real people do, but so softly, noiselessly, that to follow the development of their history is as quiet a business as watching the passage of the season. ...character shapes events quietly but irresistibly as a stream nibbles away its banks.³

Narayan's plots are simple and organic. There are no complicated knots to be untied on the last page of the novel, no thrills and sudden discoveries of the hero's being the second cousin of the maharajah of a ruling state. They are rather even, and they run on the expected lines.

³Edith Wharton, The Writing of Fiction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925) p. 128.

They offer a good contrast to the plots of Dickens, who usually attempted very complicated and tight structures. It is no wonder that Dickens's plots often assume a false theatrical air. Estella's relationship to the convict (Great Expectations) is one such instance. Too neat a structure in which every knot has been untied and every mystery resolved certainly weakens the sense of reality and gives to the novel the air of a puppet show. A discriminating reader will find it hard to lend that "willing suspension of disbelief" of which Coleridge speaks.

Consistency and plausibility are other characteristics of Narayan's plots. This plausibility is, in part, due to the freedom of growth that his characters enjoy. This freedom is, of course, different from that which Defoe gives to Moll Flanders. Moll virtually carries the plot with her. It rambles from one husband to another till she begs pardon of readers and assumes a stricter control on what had happened to her.

"In Hardy", says E. M. Forster, "the characters have to suspend their natures at every turn or else are so swept away by the course of Fate that our sense of their reality is weakened."⁴ This sense of reality lies at the back of the structure of the Malgudi novels. The sense of

⁴E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p. 140.

fate is ingrained in the Oriental mind,⁵ but Narayan hardly ever uses it as an essential part of his plots. His characters are free in motivation. So are his plots. For example, in The Bachelor of Arts the hero becomes a sanyāsi and leaves his home and parents. This does not happen because it was predestined, though Chandran's mother would surely have given this verdict, nor is it because Narayan had to send him away to give liveliness to the plot. It grows simply and naturally out of the character's really feeling a strong urge to be away from the environment which reminds him every moment of the girl he had loved and lost. Renouncing the world and throwing away all the responsibilities of life are what a character like Chandran would do in a similar situation. The fact that he is disillusioned even in "renunciation" is equally plausible and adds to the ironic interpretation of Chandran's character.

Unlike Hardy, Narayan does not depend upon accident as a means of supplying important plot-links or a determining factor in denouement. But instances can be quoted when the less motivated and sudden incidents are given great importance from the point of view of structure. For example, in The Guide the incident of Raju's putting forged signatures on the legal documents meant for Rosie is a key point. It leads to his

⁵There is a very popular saying in Hindi which says: Karama gati tēre nā tare. Karama here refers to fate or predestination. It means, "Whatever is destined is bound to happen; nothing can be done about it."

arrest. It determines the rest of the plot. It is the turning point of his life--the first climax of the story (the second is inevitable). There is nothing very improbable in such an incident. Sometimes in life it does happen so, but it is certainly not enough for its being in The Guide. It is hard to state what would have been a better way of bringing the downfall of this corrupted character, but involving him in a legal complication and then using it as a climax can not be the only one. No doubt, it turns out to be a very convenient way of manipulating arrangements. It gives neatness to the plot at the same time. But the question arises: is it desirable?

The incident which causes Margayya's house of cards to crumble (The Financial Expert) is more credible. It involves the inter-relationship of the three most important characters of the book: Margayya, the hero, Balu, his son, and Dr. Pal, a go-between. Margayya is a businessman who has been amassing a large amount of wealth by dubious means. He has, however, a good reputation. People are attracted towards him and they readily deposit their savings with him because he pays them twenty-five per cent interest. Dr. Pal has been a great help to Margayya in establishing this business. The trouble comes through the association of Dr. Pal with Balu. The son is incited against the father. There occurs a little scene in which Margayya loses his balance and commits the mistake of handling Dr. Pal--a key

man--rather roughly. In revenge for the insult, Dr. Pal gives a hint in the market that Margayya's business is not going all right. A hint is enough for a business like Margayya's to fall. In less than an hour and a half crowds are pouring in demanding their money back. Superficially, the whole break-up seems to be incidental, almost farcical, but actually it is there in the basic scheme of things. It fits perfectly well into the general pattern of the plot. A business such as Margayya had could not have lasted for a longer time. His rise from a petty moneylender of the banyan tree to a man of millions is spectacular. So is his fall.

Narayan's plots are simple, but they are usually full of dramatic possibilities. The drama inherent is often subtle. Sometimes it is even left unexplored. Consequently, the effects achieved are not uniform. Possibly they cannot be. The scope of a novel and the nature of its characters naturally influence the author in making use of these dramatic possibilities.

Grateful to Life and Death is a simple story of a young man of thirty who loses his wife and then tries to communicate with her spirit through an external medium. The whole thing moves on such a level of personal tragedy and a sense of quiet suffering that it carries the reader with it. This internal drama of a lonely and desolate man, almost tricked by fate, is extremely moving. Narayan has been quite successful

in providing it the background of social obligations.

The plot of The Bachelor of Arts is conceived on a much lighter level. Chandran lacks the depth and intensity of Krishna. His passion for Malathi is a passing phase of immaturity. The aimlessness of his character naturally influences the shape of the events of his life. In other words, the plot is heavily determined by this single characteristic of the hero. His leaving home at twenty-one and becoming a sanyāsi verges more on melodrama than on tragedy. It is very probable for a person like Chandran to take such a step. But it does lack depth, the depth of personal tragedy. Hence, his reconciliation provides the happy touch.

The plot of The Printer of Malgudi is comparatively more complex. It involves "three minds and six wild universes."⁶ The main action goes on rather rapidly. The interest shifts temporarily from one character to another. Structurally considered, the role of Srinivas is very important. It is he who integrates the plot and keeps the action moving. Almost all the characters in the novel are known to us only in proportion as they are related to him. Consistency in the use of the single point of view influences the plot-structure to a very large extent. The fact that the person whose point of view is used is himself an active participant

⁶The New York Times Book Review, May 19, 1957, p. 4.

in the action of the plot imposes a limitation on him as an observer. What happens to Sampath after the breakdown of the whole affair and what move he is next planning, Srinivas cannot tell. Sampath's own version of his "tragedy" as he relates it to Srinivas after a lapse of some time may or may not be correct. A note of slight ambiguity at the end leaves the reader to resort to his own imagination to find what Sampath, being what he is, would have done next.

The structure of Waiting for the Mahatma is comparatively very loose. The story rambles on. So does the hero. The main action of the plot is tied up closely with the political events of the period. Sriram is like a rudderless boat. Once Bharati is in jail as a political prisoner, he is in no time led into a position which is the complete antithesis of all his former beliefs and training. Part Three can be easily eliminated from the rest of the story, and it would not do any damage to the structure of the novel. The only justification for its being where it is is that it reflects once again the aimlessness of Sriram's character, the insincerity of his political beliefs, and his inability to take an independent decision. His devotion to the cause of Mahatma Gandhi is inspired, not by the spirit of patriotism, but by the passion for a girl who is the follower of the great man.

Part One of Waiting for the Mahatma is excellent. Here is Narayan at his best. He shows the same grasp, the same interest

in local color, the same mastery of organization as we find in some of the earlier novels.

Part Two takes a stroll out of Malgudi. Narayan loses his sure grasp. The action becomes diluted, the treatment discursive. Part Three, as explained above, is almost unnecessary. Part Four is exclusively devoted to Sriram's life in jail. Part Five unites the lovers. The death of the Mahatma provides a convenient curtain drop.

The same five-part structure is repeated in The Financial Expert. A comparison of its structure with the one illustrated in the preceding paragraphs can give a fair idea how a good use of external structure adds to the dramatic quality of the novel. The action mounts up till the catastrophe of Part Five. The plot being heavily centered on the chief character who can expand and adjust, the interest never flags. There are hardly any digressions. The characters are few, and they are so closely knit together that it is but natural that what happens to one is bound to exert considerable influence on the others. Balu's movements form an essential part of the plot because by throwing light on the relationship of the son and the father they reveal the hidden pathos of Margayya's inner life. Thus, it gives meaning to the apparent confusion of his character.

From the point of view of organization, The Financial Expert is a successful book. If we can quietly accept Margayya's spectacular

rise, the rest of the story goes on smoothly. Although his rise is extremely unusual and there is definitely a tinge of incredibility in it, there is nothing highly improbable. It is a Tono-Bungay kind of affair. With the state of banking in Malgudi as it is and his own manipulations practice-perfect, there is no wonder that Margayya can manage to snatch a few lakhs from his enterprise. The crash of Margayya's business almost approaches the Wall Street Crash, but it is on a slightly more humble level.

In The Financial Expert transition from one part to another is logical and smooth. It is like a five-piece puzzle where each piece fits into one another. Part One deals with the Margayya of the banyan tree. The forty-day worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, ends this part and leads to the publishing adventure of Part Two. The next part presents Margayya on a search for a more respectable business than the one he was in then. He had realised:

Money was not in its right place here, amidst all the roar of printing machinery, ugly, streaming proof sheets, and the childish debits and credits that arose from book sales with book-sellers and bookbuyers, who carried on endless correspondence over trivialities about six and a quarter and twelve and a half per cent and a few annas of postage and so forth.⁷

In Part Four Margayya is at the height of his power--the power

⁷The Financial Expert, pp. 117-18.

of money. The beginning of the next part finds him heading towards disaster, which comes through his badly spoiled son Balu. The storm comes and passes over. Calm prevails. However, it is not the calm of death but the calm of a new life. Margayya gets ready to go back into his old business under the banyan tree again.

The themes of Narayan's novels are implicit in the story and the characters. The reader is not taken by the arm to get a close view of the author's perspective. Lack of any over-explicit thesis gives freedom to his plots to grow out of characters and not from social and philosophical theories. In his novels themes of love, friendship, personal relationships and social obligations are well integrated both with the characterization and the structure of the plots.

Although the canvas of the Malgudi novels is highly localized, it is, within its limits, fairly broad. A cross-section of small town life is vividly drawn. Narayan appreciates the intrinsic merit of economy. He makes the canvas well-peopled but rarely over-crowded. The minor characters are governed more by the necessity of plot than by a penchant on Narayan's part for incidental local color. They are no doubt individualized and can be easily distinguished and remembered afterwards, but their roles are always subordinate. The place devoted to them in the main action of the plot is limited, and they are ordinarily kept in their places. Naturally, the main action grows out of the

motivations of the chief characters.

Narayan, however, is not always successful in achieving a complete integration of his plots and people. The instance of the strange headmaster of the nursery school in Grateful to Life and Death is an obvious example of such a partial failure. He is given so much prominence in the second half of the novel that he seems to be taking over the plot and making it run on his own lines. His plot almost stands apart from Krishna's. The only link that they have is that he is the headmaster of a school to which Krishna's daughter Leela goes. This link is by no means enough to justify his intrusion into the main action of the plot. If we consider his story as a sub-plot, it has to be admitted that this sub-plot is left mostly unresolved.

There is something theatrical in his character, his family, and his entire background. But the questions here are these: Does the plot really need him? Is he kept in proportion? Do the details of his life and "death" (which had been predicted, with fortunate inaccuracy, long before by an astrologer) really contribute to the artistic effects of the whole piece? Perhaps not. His talks about the new experiments in nursery school education are not only boring but irritating, too. At best, he is an idealist, a dreamer; at worst, a bungling novice making a mess of his own life and that of his family. It is a pity that Narayan wastes so much skill on him:

The traditions of the Théâtre Français used to require that the number of objects on the stage--chairs, tables, even to a glass of water on a table--should be limited to the actual requirement of the drama: the chairs must all be sat in, the table carry some object necessary to the action, the glass of water or decanter of wine be a part of the drama.⁸

This scenic principle does still serve as a guidepost to the novelist as well as to the playwright. It makes clear how unnecessary characters not only crowd the scene but also confuse the reader uselessly. The headmaster of Grateful to Life and Death is one such.

A plot moves both in space and time. The sequence of time as a determining factor in the structure of a novel is of great significance. The skill with which a time-scheme is managed influences the scope of the narrative. An author may relate the story entirely in the past tense, or he may combine the past and the present. The first method is the easiest and the most convenient one; the second needs a careful handling. The two time-schemes have to be well integrated; otherwise, the result is chaos.

Narayan's The Guide is a good illustration of the second method. In this book the two time schemes--Raju's past life and his present one--are constantly alternating. His "present" life as a reluctant holy man is seen through the author's point of view. It has a sense of immediacy.

⁸Edith Wharton, op. cit., p. 83.

Raju's life as a rail-road station food-vendor, a tourist-guide, a sentimental adulterer and a prisoner is told by Raju himself. Narayan does not interfere with the hero's point of view. The interweaving of the two time-schemes, one going straight and the other bending backwards, is artistic. Suppose Narayan had stopped with the story of Raju, the holy man, at, say, Page 100, and then let Raju relate the story of his past life to Velan uninterrupted. What would have possibly happened to the novel? Monotony in tone would have been inevitable.

It is, however, not a question of monotony alone; it could not have been possible for the author to give a complete picture of Raju--the Raju of appearance and the Raju of reality. In the present form of the book, Raju's character grows out of how he sees himself and lets others see him and how the author sees him. Since the two points of view are structurally so closely interwoven, but still preserve their identities, the author's point of view serves as a flashlight in observing what actually Raju is.

The consciousness of time as the most predominant element bringing constant changes in characters, which is present for example, in Arnold Bennett's The Old Wives Tale, is hardly felt in Narayan's novels. It is there, of course, but only in the background of the pattern of the life depicted. And it remains there.

It was customary for a Victorian novelist to enter into the scheme

of his novel in the capacity of a presiding deity. He could easily step into the action of the plot to explain something or to straighten the things out. He could take his reader aside and talk to him as to what he planned to do with a particular character at a particular time. Open sympathy for one character and condemnation for another were very common. Thackeray indulged in this technique rather too often. So did Scott. Scott's explanations and his historical disquisitions are frequently not narrative at all but mere lumps of explanatory matter. Such a phrase as "our narrative is now about to make a large stride", which serves as transition from one part of the book to another, is very common in Scott.

Modern novelists, on the whole, are very cautious about maintaining artistic illusion. In Narayan this illusion is well maintained. Even when he uses the omniscient point of view, he rarely appears on the stage in the capacity of a director or a puppet master. He goes from one character to another without letting the reader be conscious of his presence. Action is usually free of any moralizing tendency on the part of the author. The Hindu philosophical attitudes are implicit in the emotional and the spiritual set-up of the characters, but these are never made over-explicit. Nor is any attempt made to render them into a well-defined system of philosophy.

Who tells the story determines not only characterization, tone,

and description but plot-structure also. For example, if the story of The Guide had been told from a point of view other than Raju's, it would have made a tremendous difference in the method, the perspective, and the emphasis. The only other character whose point of view could possibly have been used is Rosie. If we make her the observer and the narrator, many problems of major importance immediately arise. Rosie's acquaintance with Raju begins from the time when her husband hires the services of Raju, the tourist guide. It soon grows into intimacy and eventually causes a break between the husband and the wife. When deserted by her husband, Rosie decides to live with Raju. His imprisonment, however, puts an end to this "common" life. In other words, Rosie's knowledge of Raju is strictly limited to this particular period only. How to make her know and relate Raju's life before he becomes "the railway Raju", and also that part after he becomes a holy man is a big question.

There can be perhaps many devices for getting the necessary information. But it has to be admitted that whatever device the author may use, there always lies the danger of letting a limited point of view override the logic of the structure and give the impression that the story is being made up. Moreover, it is very possible that because of a shift in the emphasis, the story may tend to be more of Rosie than of her guide and lover. Narayan's choice of using Raju's point of view is not only

logical but also the most appropriate one.

The question of the influence of point of view on structure when applied to Grateful to Life and Death is different. Here the author and the first person narrator (who is the chief character also) are one. We know only that much in which Krishna has participated. He is at the center; no side-lights are thrown at him. Thus, the scope of the plot becomes limited, but the obvious gain lies in the intensity with which the major characters are portrayed.

The question of the tone of a story in its relation to the logic of the events is an important one. In Richard Feverel Meredith departs from the story tone and, disregarding the logic of the narrative, imposes an ending for which the reader is not prepared. It is, of course, one of the rare examples of the forced tragic ending.

Forced happy endings were very common throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were more or less like a convention and had usually very little to do with the logic of plot. Sometimes the authors received letters from readers in which they were asked not to kill a particular character or to have another pair married off.

In Barchester Towers Trollope comments, "The end of a novel like the end of a children's dinner party must be made up of sweet meats and sugar plums."⁹ Criticising this attitude Henry James says: "The

⁹Barchester Towers, p. 229.

ending of a novel, is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of desserts and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes. "¹⁰

Narayan's endings are natural and logical. Usually his "happy" endings have an undertone of the "still sad music of humanity." The undertone is well sustained throughout the Malgudi novels. His is essentially the tragi-comic approach to life. In Waiting for the Mahatma the two lovers are united, but the "comedy" ends in the background of the tragedy of the Mahatma's death. This novel, however, is, by no means, the typical Narayanian novel. Its material and scope are very different from those of others. It is indirectly the history of the India of the forties. Since the book is as much about the Mahatma as it is about Sriram and Bharati, the fictional Mahatma has to die when the Mahatma of the real life is shot dead. Naturally, the novelist cannot "prepare" the readers for such a tragedy. If he had done so, it would have been a total misrepresentation of the truth. He could perhaps have ended it otherwise only if he had reduced the stretch of the time in the novel. The inclusion of Mahatma's death in the story gives poignancy and irony to the meaning of life.

The ending of The Guide is tragic, and the tragedy is mostly

¹⁰The House of Fiction, p. 102.

unrelieved. The fall of Raju has been great. So is his tragedy. Although he himself is responsible for what he does, there still persists a feeling of helplessness, particularly towards the end. A strange sense of fate broods over Raju's tragedy. For his devotees he is a swāmi, a sage who is voluntarily undertaking a twelve-day fast for their welfare. From far-off places they come to have a darshan of this sage. Where is Raju? He is struggling hard to chase away the thoughts of food from his mind. The study of his inner confusion is very revealing, and his final resolution to do penance thoroughly is almost heroic.

The Bachelor of Arts is a comedy and is meant to be such. A gentle irony pervades the book. Chandran's hysterical concern over a slight delay of his wife's letter and then his immediate departure for Taipur (where his wife is staying with her parents) are natural, though a little amusing. This is the same Chandran who had renounced the world and had become a sanyāsi only a few months back!

Grateful to Life and Death is a tragedy which ends on a note of peace and repose. It is Krishna's compromise with the inevitable. Whether the "moment of rare, immutable joy--a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death" is real or just a fancy of his excited mind we do not know. This is certain, that he has accepted

the reality of both life and death. The rest of his life is a life of struggle for transcending the boundaries of existence and non-existence.

The Printer of Malgudi is a brilliant book. The "ending" is neither tragic nor comic. Sampath is too big a character to be contained in a conventional ending. He has failed in his film-making business, but his spirits have not failed him. Narayan does not tell us what is the next bird of the catch, but we know Sampath is up to something.

The ending of Margayya's business has not ended him. He has not only survived the crash but is in good spirits. On the last page of the novel he is planning on going again with his knobby discolored tin-box to the same old banyan tree to start his life de nouveau.

The Dark Room ends in a reunion of the family. It is almost as if Ibsen's Nora had come back to her children, her husband, and her home. Savitri is no Nora, nor The Dark Room, A Doll's House. Savitri has won her independence by completely breaking away (though, only temporarily) from the house of the dark room, but she does not know what she is going to do with this newly won independence. It could be possible for a Nora to walk out of her home and husband and live a life of her own but not for the Savitri of Malgudi. Her decision to come back to her husband and children is natural and logical. Death she has narrowly escaped; what remains there is to make a compromise with life, though it is a life full of uncompensated suffering. Whether

Ramani, the haughty and unfaithful husband, changes his ways or not is an open question.

"There are", says Henry James, "two kinds of taste in the appreciation of imaginative literature: the taste for the emotion of surprise and the taste for the emotion of recognition."¹¹ It is the latter that Narayan gratifies. His heroes do not take big jumps, nor do they dance on ropes. Nothing very sensational happens in his stories. At best the heroes go out of their homes and become sanyāsīs, only to come back, marry, and settle down. Simple though his plots are, they are never dull. His unusual interest in people as people and instinctive perception of human varieties fairly compensate for the lack of so-called action. It makes Narayan successful (to borrow James's words again) in "catching the very note and trick, the strange and irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps fiction upon her feet."¹²

Narayan's plots are well toned with the background of the small town. His use of this type of background is, of course, different from that of Hardy. In The Return of the Native Egdon Heath determines the plot as well as the characters. It is, in fact, the central character of

¹¹Partial Portraits (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1905), p. 382.

¹²Ibid, p. 398

the story. Narayan's Malgudi is kept within bounds. It never overdominates, nor does it direct the flow of the plots. It is a background: vivid, alive, real, and nothing more. What happens to a Chandran or a Srinivas in Malgudi could possibly have happened to them in any other small town. For example, there is nothing particularly Malgudian in the plot of Grateful to Life and Death. The influence of Malgudi cannot be denied. It is there, but it is implicit and indirect. It is felt more distinctly on the characters than on the series of events. There is a kind of Malgudian flavor around them. While his plots can be transplanted, at least theoretically, into another setting, his people cannot be. They would become either too conspicuous or too belittled anywhere else.

In a consideration of the Malgudi novels, the question of the development of the novelist is important. Structurally considered, Narayan's later novels are much more organic and complex than the earlier ones. Swami and Friends and The Guide are almost a quarter of a century apart from each other. The first was published in 1935, when Narayan was just twenty-nine. The latest, The Guide, came out in 1958. During these twenty-three years, the author has not only matured in his philosophy of life but also has gained mastery over handling comparatively complicated plots.

Swami and Friends is a simple story of a young Indian boy who finds the half-Westernized system of education very baffling. This

theme is loosely interwoven with the theme of friendship. The plot, which consists of several episodes somehow joined together, moves mostly around these two themes. The episodes are not entirely disconnected or irreconcilable, but, on the other hand, they do not contribute to any organic whole as such. In fact, there is no central point or "peak." Some of the incidents can easily be eliminated without doing any damage to the "plot" or even characterization. For instance, the chapter entitled "The Coachman's Son" can easily be left out and the story will move on without missing any links. Other incidents like "Broken Panes" and "What is a Tale?" are better integrated with the subject and the characters. On the whole, there is no well-defined development either in the action or in the characterization.

The world of Swami and Friends is the world of innocence, but it is not free from the corrupting influences of the adult world. Life at school for these boys is not an easy affair. It gets even worse by the strict control imposed on them at home. The arithmetic lessons are intricate and puzzling, and the geography ones are dull, but Swami and Samuel the "Pea" somehow manage to keep themselves entertained by a constant companionship in giggling and passing remarks. It is refreshing to see these young mischievous brains busy in devising strange means of escapades. The characterization makes a significant contribution to the unity of impression which, to some extent, holds the

various strands of the structure together.

The internal structure of the novel is not uniform throughout. The first half of the book (up to Chapter XII) is very loosely organized. It rambles all the way from "Rajam's Tail" to "The Coachman's Son." The final examinations give a little climax to the fever and excitement of the preparation days. The "Broken Panes" lead to grave consequences, and Swami finds himself dismissed from the school. It brings an end to an important chapter of Swami's life--life at Albert Mission School. Naturally he feels deserted and outcast by his friends.

The formation of the M.C.C. (Chapter XIII) gives not only to Swami a new life, but also a structure unity to the plot. All that happens to Swami and Rajam after their new alliance is directly related to or determined by the test match they have challenged the rival team to play. Swami's dramatic but unfortunate disappearance from home has an air of plausibility. It is not just a device for sending Swami out of the town and making the whole situation complicated; it is well motivated. With Swami's disappearance the cricket match has to be played without the "Tate" of the team. No wonder the M.C.C. suffers a disgraceful defeat. That is, however, not the end. A rift becomes inevitable in the friendship of Swami and Rajam. Rajam cannot forgive Swami for his share in the collapse of their "renowned" team. Swami still hopes that he will be forgiven someday.

The action of the novel, as is clear, is poorly organized. It follows perhaps no other principle but that of keeping the boys busy. As the events happen in chronological order, a chronicles-of-childhood type of plot is the inevitable result. The interest of the reader is sustained, not by the logic of the incidents, but by the life-like quality of the characters presented. Another important factor contributing to whatever unity the structure has is the setting. This is Narayan's first novel and he has here introduced Malgudi. It is so vividly pictured that by the end of this small volume it is more than an established reality.

In The Bachelor of Arts (1938) Narayan is no more "in the workshop." Considered from the point of view of the structure, it shows a considerable improvement over the first book. It is not a chronicle but a fairly penetrative study of Chandran's character. The plot grows out of his reaction to the established social traditions. He can neither change them nor accept them. He finds an easy solution of the dilemma in becoming a sanyāsi and renouncing worldly life. Sometime later, it proves to be nothing more than a simple disillusionment of self. A come-back to the normal life followed by a traditional marriage not only gives meaning to the Bachelor of Art's life but a neat and rounded ending to the plot of the novel also.

Chandran is at the center of The Bachelor of Arts. His character

is revealed in the situations for which he himself is, in part, responsible. Such incidents which do not directly contribute to the action of the story are either eliminated or much toned down. By putting proper emphasis where it is due, coherence is achieved. The aimlessness of his life, disillusionment born out of love and friendship, and the attitude of compromise are all well-integrated with the type of person that Chandran is.

Compared with Swami and Friends, this book has a decidedly improved organization. The structure is logical without being formal. It lacks the dramatic perfection of some of the later novels, but it does possess a narrative ease, a continuity, and a flow which gives it a marked unity of impression.

Another important change in the external framework of the novel is its division into four parts. In Swami and Friends there are nineteen chapters, and each chapter has a little episode of its own. For example, "Granny Shows Her Ignorance" forms the subject matter of one complete chapter. Reducing nineteen chapters into four parts is not important in itself; its significance lies in the influence it exerts on the internal structure of the novel. Each part of The Bachelor of Arts is a unit as well as a part of the whole organism. It registers some important change or development in the action of the plot or the characterization. Part One depicts Chandran as the typical South Indian college boy. In Part Two he

has become the Bachelor of Arts, but has not been able to decide what he wants to do in his future. Love for a girl whom he cannot marry because their horoscopes do not match brings disillusionment into his life. The next part shows Chandran out of Malgudi, away from the sight of his lost love. His experiences of seven months in the pose of a sanyāsi are compressed into this part. In the last part he is back in his home settling in a job and marrying a girl of his own community.

The Bachelor of Arts, in spite of an improved structural organization, when placed in the proper context of the development of Narayan's art, is nearer to Swami and Friends than to The Financial Expert. As a matter of fact, it is almost a companion piece to the first novel. That is perhaps one reason why the Michigan State University Press bought them out in one volume (1954).

In the year which saw the publication of The Bachelor of Arts, there appeared another novel, The Dark Room. Srinivasa Iyengar calls it an "Indian variation on Ibsen's A Doll's House."¹³ He has made quite a good point here. Some of the situations of Narayan's novel so closely resemble those in Ibsen's play that Iyengar's comment does not seem to be exaggerated. However, one should not disregard the fact that the spirit in which the characters are conceived is entirely different.

¹³K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, Indo-Anglian Literature (Bombay: The International Book House Ltd., 1943), p. 45.

Ramani is too haughty and autocratic for Ibsen's Helmer. Savitri is neither "sweet-lark" nor "pretty doll-bird"; she lacks Nora's charm, tenderness, and independence. She has suffered in life, but she has borne it quietly. All these years the dark room has been the place of her refuge. The children know this little secret of the "mysterious" room. At least they can figure out that things are not going all right with mother and father.

Ramani is almost a dictator both in his office and his home. Besides owning a big house and a number of servants, he owns his wife and children, too. His word is the law. His children are virtually scared of him, and his wife dare not oppose him on any point. His treatment of his wife can, by no human standards, be justified. His liaison with Shanta Bai brings a crisis in the family. When Savitri cannot bear it any longer, she rebels, leaves her house, and goes to Sarayu to find eternal peace in its watery bed. A passing villager takes her out of the water before it is too late. After a few days she returns home, and all seems to be well that ends well.

The characters in this novel are types, just conventional figures. Ramani is unredeemed throughout. His relation with Shanta Bai is not impossible, but still one gets the impression that the whole thing is being made up for the convenience of the plot. The Krogstad affair of A Doll's House is still more plausible and dramatically effective than

this Shanta Bai-Ramani romance. The best part of the book is that which deals with the preparations for the Navaratri celebrations.

Technically, The Dark Room is not very poor; there are some good scenes in it. But weak and unbalanced characterization spoils the technical effects.

1945 saw the publication of The English Teacher (the title was changed to Grateful to Life and Death in the first American edition, 1955). In 1939 the author (like his new hero) had lost his wife. It is not known exactly when he started writing the novel, but the acute sense of personal suffering which permeates the structure of The English Teacher leads one to presume that it was perhaps written when the wound was still fresh. The autobiographical element looms large in the background of the plot. How much of himself the author had put into Krishna is an interesting but a tricky question. Going into this discussion without an intimate knowledge of the author's personal life is an extremely difficult task. Therefore, in the consideration of the novel's technique and plot any influences that the incidents of the novelist's own life might have had will simply be left out. An attempt will be made to deal with the novel as it is.

The English Teacher is Narayan's first tragedy--the tragedy of personal loss and loneliness. Krishna has suffered but has survived the ordeal through courage, patience, and devotion. Partial success in his

attempts to communicate with the spirit of his dead wife provide him what he needs most: peace and harmony. This section of the plot appears to be an elaborate fantasy. But the intensity and sincerity with which the story is conceived, the sharing of Krishna's life and feelings by the readers make one forget the question of "authenticity." The artistic integration of the theme and the characters impose enough credulity.

The plot is simple, and the effects are achieved through small details of the young couple's everyday life. The setting, as usual in Narayan's novels, helps in establishing a sense of reality. The structure is more like a framework than a zig-saw puzzle. Without being loose, it gives enough freedom to the characters to establish themselves as real men and women.

With Mr. Sampath (1949, but republished in America under the title of The Printer of Malgudi in 1957) we enter into a period of complicated plots. The novel is well-peopled without being over-crowded. There is plenty of humor, both of characterization and of situation. The satire, though well-defined, is not bitter. The comedy, with slight touches of farce, is all-pervasive. And beneath all this there runs the undertone of sadness. This tragic-comic-satiric tone unites the structural framework of the plot.

The characters are brought together, first, through the publication

of the weekly magazine The Banner, and then through the production of the film, "The Burning of Kama." The outcome is an effective story of interesting people and their complicated relationships. Sampath towers over all other characters, sets the pace of the action, and unites the various strands. There is enough justification for the book to be named after him.

It is not only the tone and the characterization which give structural unity to the plot; the setting has its due share, too. The groans of the treadle in the Truth Printing Works situated in the Kabir Lane give appropriate background to the noisy drama of these "petty" lives. It also creates a natural rhythm.

The structure of The Financial Expert (1952) relies heavily on the central character--"the sad, ambitious, absurd financial expert." His dreams of wealth, his ambitions for a rise in social prestige, his innocent pride in his badly-spoiled son, and his inner confusion--all these form the rich texture of the story. The sequence is simple but dramatic. The incidents, particularly of the last section, carry conviction in spite of being what they are. Margayya's magnetic personality infuses life into the skeleton of the plot.

Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) is quite different from the two novels which precede it. The difference is one of breadth as well as of depth. There are no Margayyas, no Sampaths. In their place we

have here a poor version of Chandran placed in a different social setting. They have much in common: their aimlessness, their romantic ideals of love, and their incapability in making independent decisions.

Sriram's emotional involvement with Bharati--who happens to be a devotee of Mahatma Gandhi--makes up the entire plot. The movement is caused more by the outside pressure of the political situation than by the inner need of the characters. Bharati is a little too idealized, and Sriram a little too flat. As a result, the story, at times, gets out of hand. The interest is sustained, to some extent, by numerous other occurrences that happen in the country at that time (and fill the pages of the book). The organization of the plot is very loose. It could have been compressed with a more vigilant eye on the characters.

The Guide (1958) has a much more skilfully-managed plot than that of Waiting for the Mahatma. It is the story of Raju as viewed from two perspectives. The power of the story comes mostly from the central character, who develops and changes and combines in himself dishonesty and credulity in equal measure. His love-affair with Rosie, a dancing girl, is too conspicuous for the humble setting of Malgudi. The picture of Raju's background and his childhood is very powerfully drawn. The transition from the Railway Raju to Mr. Raju of Lawley Extension is natural but swift. The legal complications arising from a forged signature are rather of the nature of Deux ex Machina. Certainly these

are not irreconcilable with the character of the hero. His becoming a holy man is almost like assuming a new role, or rather being born into a new life. But basically he is the same, a double-faced man.

The development of the plot is dramatic. The incidents contribute to the rise of the action. The theme, the characters, and the actions are closely knit together. The consistent use of the single point of view in relating Raju's past life affects the structure of the plot considerably. A penetrative study of the central character is successfully done through a shift in the perspective and emphasis. The result is a powerful story of well-drawn characters in convincing situations.

From Swami and Friends to The Guide is a long way. It presents a striking illustration of an artist's development. The growth in technique from the chronicle-type story of young Swami to the well-integrated and dramatic structure of The Guide means a lifetime devotion to sincerity, artistic integrity, and constant search for perfection in structure and expression. Yet The Guide is by no means the end of it. It may be only a landmark. Who knows about the yet-to-be-written masterpiece that Narayan of Malgudi may give us one day?

CHAPTER IV

ATTITUDES

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends.... We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it.... The law of life. No sense in battling against it.¹

These words of Krishna raise an important issue which is fundamental to Narayan's basic philosophy of life. It is the issue of the freedom of the individual. Are our actions predetermined? Or are we free to choose and to act? Is there really "no sense in battling against the law of life"?

The question of the freedom of the individual as conceived by Hindu thinkers is intimately tied up with another fundamental concept, the concept of karma. The theory of karma does not belong to the

¹Grateful to Life and Death, p. 203.

realm of metaphysics only--the question of being and non-being, immortality, and the transmigration of the soul--; it permeates all aspects of the social organization of Hindu society. A study of Narayan's attitudes will include the study of these fundamental concepts of Hindu thought, the social structure of Hindu society, the impact of Western ideas, and the changes in outlook brought about by such an impact.

The most significant question with which one can start is: what is the general attitude of a Hindu toward life? It is a key question, and directly or indirectly, it influences all other considerations. The very ideal of the spiritual growth of the individual is the direct outcome of the way that a Hindu looks at life. All the religious and the social sanctions which put restraint on the freedom of the individual are eventually determined by such an outlook.

From the Vedas to the Upanishads and the Puranas, one theme which occurs again and again is the theme of the transitory nature of this life. This life merely by itself has no meaning. It is no more than a link between a previous and a future existence. It is just a part, a very small one, of the process of the continuity of life. It is "a step on a road, the direction and goal of which are lost in the infinite. On this road, death is never an end or an

obstacle but at the most the beginning of new steps."² This process, this cycle of births and deaths, goes on unless final liberation (moksha) is attained within the span of a particular life.³

Such an attitude toward life is coupled with the law of the deed and its retribution (karma). Narayan refers to this law of karma several times in his novels. It might be interesting to investigate at a later stage how far the actions of his characters are influenced by this basic concept of karma. But before trying to trace a system of beliefs based on such a concept in Narayan's novels, it is necessary to find out what karma is and what it implies for a Hindu.

"Karma", according to Radhakrishnan, "is not a mechanical principle but a spiritual necessity. It is the embodiment of the mind and will of God."⁴ Reduced to its simplest and basic dimensions it

²S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1925), II, 27.

³See Madhu Kanda and Yājñavalkya of Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad (The Principal Upaniṣads, ed. and trans. S. Radhakrishnan, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953) for a detailed exposition of the nature of self, ultimate reality, and moksha.

⁴Indian Philosophy, II, 73. See the Svetāsvatara Upaniṣad, particularly, Chapter VI 11, p. 746:

eko devas sarva-bhūteshu gūḍhas sarva-vyāpī
sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā.
karmādhyaḥshas sarva-bhūtādhivāsas sākṣhī
cetā kevalo nirgunas ca.

"The one God hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the inner self of all beings, the ordainer of all deeds, who dwells in all being,

means, "You shall reap as you sow." Since life according to the Hindu view means continuity, a man's vicious and virtuous deeds follow him after death and determine his fate in the next birth. God is its supervisor--a Karamādhyaśah.⁵ In the opening verse of his gloss on Yājñavalkya-smṛiti, the commentator Balambhatta says that from the accumulation of karma grow the threefold results: first, jāti (birth in a high or low position); second, āyu (the length of life); and third, bhog (the enjoyment or suffering of the individual being).⁶ But the law of life "is not so much imposed from without as wrought into our natures."⁷ The recognition of this fact frees the individual to act without being under any influence of the caprices of a chaotic and haphazard factor called fate or destiny. When the sages of the

the witness, the knower, the only one, devoid of qualities."

⁵The idea of karmaphala (the fruition of deeds) and rebirth is developed in Katha Upaniṣad (see Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upaniṣads, pp. 595-648) Chapter I, section 1, śloka 6 of the Katha Upaniṣad says:

anupasya yathā pūrve pratipasya tathāpare
sasyam iva martyaḥ pacyate sasyam iva
jayāte punaḥ.

"Consider how it was with the forefathers; behold how it is with the later men; a mortal ripens like corn, and like corn is born again."

For the same subject see also Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad III 2, 13, and IV 4, 2-6.

⁶Quoted from P. N. Prabhu, Hindu Social Organization (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1954), p. 35.

⁷Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927), p. 73.

Upanishads say, "As is his desire, such is his purpose; as is his purpose, such is the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself,"⁸ they point to the same thing.

The law of karma has often been misinterpreted. This is how Macdonnell interprets it:

A result of the combined doctrine of transmigration and karma is, it is true, to reconcile men to their fate as the just retribution for deeds done in a previous life, but on the other hand it paralyzes action, drives to asceticism and makes action self-regarding, since it becomes the aim of every man to win salvation for himself individually, by acquiring the right knowledge.⁹

A. B. Keith, a reputed scholar of Sanskrit literature, also interprets the law of karma as "essentially fatalistic."¹⁰

The law of karma has two aspects--continuity with the past and the freedom of the self. These two aspects are not necessarily inconsistent with each other. To the contrary, they supplement each other. Karma in the right sense of the word does not mean inaction. The central theme of the Bhagavad-Gita, the sacred book of the Hindus, is the theme of action. "Action" which Gita advocates is not just any

⁸Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanishads, p. 272: sa yathakāmo bhavati, tat kratur bhavati, yat kratur bhavati, tat karma kurute, yat karma kurute, tat abhisampadyate.

⁹A. A. Macdonnell, Lectures on Comparative Religion (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1925), p. 67.

¹⁰The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), II, 596.

action; it is modified by two kinds of checks. An action has to be performed without selfishness--without any desire for the fruits of the action:

The ignorant work
For the fruit of their action:
The wise must work also
Without desire
Pointing man's feet
To the path of his duty.¹¹

The idea of "mine" and "thine" should not enter into the action.¹²

Secondly, it is only dharma (right action) that one should strive for.

Dharma (which is often mistranslated into English as religion) does not mean just worship of God and an ascetic way of life, but "duties" that a man is expected to perform as a member of a family, caste, and society.¹³

The responsibility that lies on the individual is great. Nothing that is thought, spoken, or done by him can escape being credited or discredited to his account. One cannot voluntarily stop doing karma, because karma means life. As long as an individual lives, he has to do karma. The freedom from karma which is a prerequisite to the "final

¹¹The Song of God (Bhagavad-Gita), trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood: The Marcel Rodd Co., 1944), p. 56.

¹²The Bhagavad-Gita, ed. and trans. S. Radhakrishnan (New York: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, 1948), pp. 138-39 (III 19).

¹³Ibid., p. 134 (III 7).

liberation" cannot be achieved by stopping doing karma but by doing dharma. Bhagavad-Gita, Mahabharata, and Smrities, all agree with this basic attitude.¹⁴

The universe is not one in which every detail is decreed. We do not have a mere unfolding of a pre-arranged plan. There is no such thing as absolute prescience on the part of God, for we are all his fellow workers. God is not somewhere above us and beyond us, he is also in us.... The real is an active developing life and not a mechanical routine.¹⁵

Thus the spiritual element in man gives him enough scope for genuine rational freedom. Such a freedom is necessarily limited by the nature (traits which are inherent) of the being. Man has choice, but the choice is not the same thing as caprice. Free will does not mean unrelated, undetermined, and uncaused choice. The law of karma implies that man has the freedom to use his material. The material is influenced by the deeds of the past lives, but the guidance for realising the truth and acting accordingly comes through jnan (knowledge). On the problem of freedom for the self and the law of karma Radhakrishnan comments:

The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we

¹⁴For a detailed discussion of the problem see Prabhu, "The Bases of Human Relations," Hindu Social Organization, pp. 15-69.

¹⁵Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, p. 76.

play, we gain or lose. And there is freedom.¹⁶

In the light of the above concepts of Hindu thought, it will be interesting to find out how far Narayan's attitude toward life and its meaning in all its aspects is related to these. Basically, his attitude, both as related to the ultimate reality and as being just a social phenomenon, is not different from that of a traditional Hindu. It is nourished on the same roots, and it breathes the same air, but he is aware of the silent changes that are imperceptibly creeping into Hindu social institutions and thus into the way of life. The impact of Western civilization on life as it is lived in Malgudi is discernible, if not too obvious. Here is a society which still holds strongly to its roots, but the winds blowing from outside have brought some change in its tone and color. It is passing through a period of transition. It is changing slowly and unwillingly.

Another point which has some significance is the extent and intensity of such a change, for it has not been able to touch all the levels of Hindu society in the same way. Truly speaking, it is only the educated class which is really affected by it. The masses have remained what they were, live and think and act the same way as their forefathers did. Even in the case of the educated minority the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 75.

Western influence has not made them abandon all the old traditions and begin on a clean slate again. At best, they have begun to feel quite strongly an urge to seek new interpretations of the old systems which had started stagnating. The need for a living tradition is keenly felt. Various movements, social as well as religious, of the last hundred years in India, movements like Brahmo Samāj in the east and Arya Samāj in the west, are the inevitable outcome of such a phenomenon.

Narayan's attitude toward the problem of human existence and its various manifestations is completely free from any strain of that pessimism which is often associated, though wrongly, with the Hindu concept of māyā (illusion) and other-worldliness. In his scheme of life his people are not doomed. He seems to believe with the distinguished philosopher Radhakrishnan that "The worst sinner has a future as the greatest saint has had a past. No one is so good or so bad as he imagines."¹⁷ Narayan is aware of the divine possibilities of man, though he does not portray saints. Of course, he is also aware of the evil tendencies of man which make him a sinner and create social barricades. He is equally aware of social and economic factors which tend to govern the action of the individual, his attitude toward social

¹⁷Ibid., p. 71.

institutions and his relationship with others.

Narayan conceives of life in the spirit of comedy, but it is not a hilarious and farcical type of comedy. There is hope for regeneration, hope for the future. Even a sinner like Raju, who has sinned against himself and is living a double life, is given a chance to decide for himself and to give up his life voluntarily. Death calls him at his door. But he has availed himself of the chance of becoming heroic in responding to it. He is made a martyr, a saint, a saint with a past which is known only to Velan, his devoted follower. In death at least he has found an ideal worth striving for.

The cases of the Bachelor of Arts and the Printer of Malgudi are different. They have an optimistic view of life. This optimism, however, is a qualified one. Chandran has become wiser through experience; he has learned how to face life with confidence and hope. The clouds of disillusionment which had made him seek peace (or probably revenge) in becoming a sanyāsi have passed away. Chandran enters grihasthashrama.

Sampath has already told his secret when he tells Srinivas on their first meeting, "I tell you, Sir, I'm an optimist in life. I believe in keeping people happy."¹⁸ He is an optimist not only in beliefs but also in actions. Sudden vicissitudes in his circumstances do not throw him out of gear. He still can preserve some balance to

¹⁸The Printer of Malgudi, p. 85.

stand and think of a new scheme to counteract the failures of the preceding one. He can rise to all occasions with equal gusto. Whether it is Somu Sundram with raised eyebrows and an annoyed face over the delay in the printing of the inaugural speech, or the old stingy landlord with thousands of rupees in the bank and a persistent request for finding a suitable boy for his granddaughter of marriageable age makes no difference to Sampath. He knows well how to handle them all, and he also knows when to quote his guru's verses:

When I become a handful of ash what do I
care who takes my purse,
Who counts my coins and who locks the
door of my safe,
When my bones lie bleaching, what matter
if the door of my house is left unlocked?¹⁹

Sampath is not the one to keep the door of his house unlocked, dead or alive!

Sriram is just the opposite of what Sampath stands for. For him if there is any world it is the one where Bharati lives. He is like a straw in a running stream whose fate depends on the swift currents. Indecision is his "tragic" flaw--a flaw which accidentally makes his life a comedy instead of turning it into a tragedy. It is his karma!

Coming back to the freedom of the individual, we may say that people in Malgudi are free but only in a highly qualified sense.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 209.

No doom or curse hangs over their destiny. No machinations of "fate" disturb their schemes. No flood comes to wipe away the villains of the plots. Whatever they do, they themselves are responsible. No evil spirits from outside advise Raju to fall in love with a married girl, abandon his mother, then go to jail for a forgery, and in the end pose as a sanyāsi, a real saint. If there ever was any devil, it was the devil in him--his desires, his selfishness, and his deceptive appearances. No one suggests to Sriram that he leave his home and his dear old grandmother, and take to a life whose meaning is beyond his comprehension. The actions of Narayan's characters are rooted in their very natures. A Sriram could never have acted the way that a Raju does. The simple and very logical reason is that Raju is Raju, and Sriram, Sriram.

It is only in this particular sense that Narayan's people are free. But they are not free to act out of their natures. Their freedom has several checks--the checks of caste, religion, economy, social prestige, family structure, and the pressure of social relationships. This corresponds to the idea of qualified freedom related to the law of karma as conceived by Hindu philosophers and sociologists. Such a concept has already been discussed at some length in an earlier section.²⁰

²⁰See above, pp. 153-158.

The question of these checks will be dealt with in the section on Hindu social organization.

Narayan's basic attitude toward life is a positive one. A Krishna may feel in the moment of utter dejection and loneliness ~~that~~ there is no sense in fighting against the battle of life, but Margayyas and Sampaths, Chandrans and Srinivases confidently declare that all battles are worth fighting. To go back to Krishna (Grateful to Life and Death), does he really give up the game thinking life to be an impossible proposition? Perhaps not.

It is significant to investigate how Narayan weaves some of the fundamental concepts of Hindu philosophy into the pattern of life in Malgudi. It is not the question of imposing a system of philosophy on the physical structure of the plot that we are interested in; what interests us more is the characters' way of life rather than their form of thought. The novelist does not have to tell us that a particular character believes in the principle of karma. We know he does.²¹

²¹Regarding Hindu ideas and ideals Risley comments in The People of India (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1908): "These ideals are not the monopoly of the learned, they are shared in great measure by the man in the street. If you talk to a fairly intelligent Hindu peasant about Paramātmā, Karma, Māyā, Mukti, and so forth, you will find as soon as he has got over his surprise at your interest in such matters that the terms are familiar to him, and that he has formed a rough working theory of their bearing on his own future."

It is all written in his actions. Sometimes, however, Narayan does refer consciously to some such concepts. It is not to veil his novels with a metaphysical covering that he does so; nor is it an attempt to make us aware that there are some such phenomena as karma and rebirth. The purposes in such cases vary according to the context in which they are placed.

For example, in Part One of The Financial Expert the priest who is assisting Margayya in setting his stars right has also performed a pujā for a crippled child whose condition has been growing worse from day to day. It is a pujā which, as the priest says, was performed once by Markandya (a mythical figure) who consequently lived till eternity without ever getting old. Margayya cannot suppress a doubt:

"Will the child live?" asked Margayya, his interest completely roused.

"How can I say? It's our duty to perform a Puja; the result cannot be our concern. It's Karma."

"Yes, Yes," agreed Margayya somewhat baffled.²²

What interests us here is not whether any pujā can or cannot have the efficacy of curing a fatal physical disease, but the pervasiveness of the ideal of doing duty without being concerned for the result. This is the central theme of the Bhagavad-Gita. It baffles Margayya, because it is for results (wealth) that he has come to consult his

²²The Financial Expert, p. 33.

spiritual adviser. Narayan's slightly ironic attitude toward the priest makes the lack of conformity between the ethical ideals and general practice evident.

In another place in the same book Margayya feels skeptical of the power of the mantras (hymns). He likes to be reassured that the instructions of the priest will, if followed properly, produce a vast amount of wealth. He asks the priest:

"Will they produce results?"

"Who can say?" the priest answered. "Results are not in our hands."²³

The priest has completely snubbed him:

Margayya felt crushed under this metaphysical explanation. He bowed his head in humility. The priest closed one door, held his hand on the other, and said: "The Shastras lay down such and such rituals for such and such ends. Between a man who performs them and one who doesn't, the chances are greater for the former. That's all I can say. The results are...you may have results or you may not...or you may have results and wish that you had failed--"²⁴

It is very convenient for the priest to reduce everything to the law of probability. It presupposes a capricious divine scheme revelling in giving surprises to mortals. What the priest says about results is, no doubt, based on the teachings of Gita, but it is still not the same. In Gita Krishna says to Arjun, "Do your dharma without

²³Ibid., p. 56.

²⁴Loc. cit.

thinking of the fruits." Here in The Financial Expert we have almost the same words but placed in a different context. It is for the ends that the priest has advised Margayya to perform certain rituals. The "rituals" have nothing to do with the concept of doing dharma or one's duty. Ironically enough, Margayya is starting with the "ends." Therefore, the very question of being indifferent to them does not arise.

Another interpretation of the law of karma, which is completely fatalistic in its implication and which is not very uncommon in India, is that given by Chandran's mother. Birth, marriage, death, the three major phases of human existence, are in the Hindu mind tied up with the concept of karma. According to this interpretation, everything is predetermined, preconceived, and prearranged. Talking of marriage, Chandran's mother says:

It is all a matter of fate. You can marry only the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When the time comes, let her be the ugliest girl, she will look all right to the destined eye.... It is all settled already, the husband of every girl and wife of every man. It is in nobody's choice.²⁵

Such an approach reduces this universe into an extremely neat little checker board in which every movement of the individual has been planned by an external agency called fate even before he is born. In such a scheme the question of choice cannot arise since choice is not

²⁵The Bachelor of Arts, p. 158.

in anyone's power. Such an attitude can be very conveniently made an excuse for inertia and timidity. It frees the individual from any responsibility whatsoever. At the same time, it denies the individual any scope of repentance and improvement. The sinner is told, "Not only are you a wreck, but that is all you could ever have been. That was your pre-ordained being from the beginning of time."²⁶ No wonder if we find in the social history of the country such an approach being made sometimes a weapon of exploitation of the Shudras (the fourth and the lowest caste) by the upper castes.

Before going into the individual and the social aspects of the law of karma as revealed in the Hindu systems of āshrama (different stages of man's life) and of varana (caste), Narayan's attitude toward such concepts as life after death, immortality, and transmigration of soul may be briefly touched upon.

The very plot of Grateful to Life and Death strongly suggests a belief in some kind of life after death. Sushila, Krishna's wife, not only communicates with her husband after her death, she is aware of each and every movement that he takes in this world. She observes even his thoughts that pass through his subconscious or half-conscious mind from time to time. A "spirit" informs him, "The lady wants to say

²⁶Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, p. 76.

that she is as deeply devoted to her husband and child and the family as ever. She watches over them and prays for their welfare--only she is able to see things far more clearly than when she was on earth, although you are not aware of my presence at times."²⁷

And again,

Here we are, a band of spirits who've been working to bridge the gulf between life and afterlife.²⁸

Or,

...please understand that this work may revolutionize human ideas, and that you are playing a vital part in it. This is an attempt to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called Death.²⁹

But when the headmaster of Grateful to Life and Death is asked about his belief in death and afterlife, he has a different answer:

It is all a matter of personal faith and conviction. But I am not interested in life after death. I have no opinion either way. There may be a continuation in other spheres, under other conditions, or there may not be. It is immaterial to me. The only reality I recognize is death. To me it is nothing more than a full-stop.³⁰

Once again he clarifies his position:

²⁷Grateful to Life and Death, p. 131.

²⁸Ibid., p. 126.

²⁹Ibid., p. 129.

³⁰Ibid., p. 187.

But my trust is only in regard to matters of this life, not an inch beyond.... My knowledge of past, present, and future strictly pertain to this life. Beyond that I have nothing to say, because I believe I shall once again be resolved into the five elements of which I'm composed: and my intelligence and memory may not be more than what we see in air and water.³¹

In view of these conflicting opinions of his characters, it is rather difficult to tell what may be the novelist's own attitude to this problem. Like Krishna he may believe in afterlife, or like the headmaster he may consider death as a full-stop.³² Comparatively, the headmaster's views appear to be more sound and rationalistic.

The same difficulty arises when an attempt is made to deduce the attitude of the novelist toward the concept of rebirth and transmigration of soul from what some of his characters think and believe. There is a good deal of consistency, but the possibilities of contradiction are ever present. Beliefs in rebirth and transmigration of soul are some of the commonly believed concepts of Hindu society. The philosophical basis of these concepts as revealed in ancient Hindu texts has been discussed earlier in the chapter. The main interest here is in their ethical implications. These concepts are not limited

³¹Ibid., p. 187.

³²For the view of the Upanishads on the problem of Self after death see Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad (Radhakrishnan's The Principal Upaniṣads) IV, 3, 35-38 and IV, 4, 1-24.

to the metaphysical treatises of shāstrakārs; they are all-pervasive in the beliefs, thoughts and actions of the common man. These beliefs, however, as they have passed from generation to generation have accumulated some "alien" matter, a little contradiction here, a dogma there. But on the whole they have followed the main roots. In spite of the impact of Western ideas, people in India even today still believe in the concept of rebirth, in the law of karma as an active principle sustaining life. It is very natural for the old house-owner of Grateful to Life and Death to say: "College teachers! I revere college teachers, our Gurus. Meritorious deeds in previous births make them gurus in this life."³³ This is not only a belief in the principle of retribution, but also a conviction of the continuity of life. It also reflects the social aspects of the law of karma and the religious and social sanctions of certain occupations.

According to the Hindu shāstras there are four factors which influence man as a social being. These are desha (place), kāla (time), shrama (effort), and guna (inherent traits). The acceptance of desha and kāla as determining factors allows scope for variability and modification.³⁴ It makes the goodness or badness of a particular action relative.

³³Narayan, Grateful to Life and Death, p. 25.

³⁴Quoted from Prabhu, Hindu Social Organization, p. 73.

The circumstances under which such an action is performed decide whether it should be justified or not. For example, Sriram's leaving his home and his old grandmother can be justified if we consider the factors of desha, kāla, and his contribution to the struggle for national freedom.

It is important to note how Narayan places shrama and guna in the scheme of social organization. Under shrama man is considered a social being with reference to his training and development in the natural and social environment. The factor of guna studies man in relation to his natural disposition and attitudes. The study of these two factors leads eventually to the study of two corresponding schemes of Hindu social structure, āshrama (stages of life) and varana (caste). In order to understand Narayan's general attitude toward the social organization of the society he writes about, it is necessary to evaluate, if possible, the relative emphasis that he puts on these factors. It has a double significance, because once again it takes us back to the original question with which this study of attitudes began, the question of the freedom of the individual. A too-rigid insistence on the varana system and all that it implies will not only put a heavy limitation on the freedom of the individual, it will also automatically assume complete control on the pattern of social behavior.

Etymologically, the word āshrama is derived from the Sanskrit

root word shrama, which means "to exert oneself." By derivation it may mean either a place where exertion is performed or the act of performing exertions.³⁵ In its specific connotation the word signifies a halt in the journey of man's life. From the times of the Vedas and the Upanishads, Hindu philosophers and sociologists have recognised four āshramas in man's life. The first in order is the brahmachary-āshrama (that part of life which should be completely devoted to acquiring knowledge). The second is the grihastāshrama (the time when one assumes the responsibilities of married life). One is supposed to be in this āshrama for twenty-five years--from the age of twenty-five to fifty. The next period, from fifty to seventy-five, is known as the vānaprasthāshrama. It is time for one to be free from the social and family obligations and lead a retired life of meditation in forests. The fourth and the last is the sanyāsāshrama. It means life of complete renunciation. From the point of view of social valuation, the second āshrama is given superiority; from that of acquisition of knowledge by the individual the brahmacharyāshrama would evoke the highest praise; while from the point of view of the individual's salvation the sanyāsāshrama would take the place of honor.

³⁵See P. Deussen, "Āshrama," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1924-1926), pp. 128-131.

Realistically speaking, this scheme of āshramas has lost much of its meaning in modern times. The strict code of adapting to this pattern is not only neglected, but also thought to be unnecessary. Of course, people do lead some sort of student life (How different indeed from the original Hindu ideals and practices), marry and settle down in grihasthāshrama, but very few retire to forests and then renounce the world by becoming sanyāsi. A glance at the world of Malgudi can well illustrate this point. Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts present a picture of modern "brahmachāryāshrama"--Swami in his Albert Mission School, Chandran with his Mohans and Veeraswamis. Other characters in the rest of the novels have surely passed through such ordeals as poor Swami has to struggle with, but they enter our novels a little late (and thus deprive us of a chance to sympathize with them over their too pitiable lot). According to the accepted traditions of brahmachāryāshrama, a student is expected to lead a life of rigorous discipline and purity and should not even think of the other sex. How disciplined Chandran's life is we all know. It is perhaps the discipline of indiscipline. As far as the issue of sex is concerned, Chandran is not only attracted by Malathi, he is ready to fight with his parents and the society to see his marriage with Malathi settled.

Grihasthāshrama seems to be the cornerstone of Malgudi. The

novelist appears to be quite anxious to see that everybody in his novels is married, or is getting married. On the other hand, we do not have anyone getting ready for vānaprasthāshrama. No one goes to forests to retire from life. Sampath visits the Mempi Forests (Peak House is situated in these forests) with the actress Shanti not to retire from life but to acquire some more.

Sanyāsis in Malgudi are rather too many. In The Bachelor of Arts Chandran becomes a sanyāsi but only in a qualified sense and that, too, for a short while. Once he is back in Malgudi, things somehow get straightened out in no time. In The Printer of Malgudi the old landlord poses as a sanyāsi. In The Guide Raju has no other option but really to become one, at least in the eyes of the people. Sriram (Waiting for the Mahatma) would surely have become one if Narayan had not arranged his marriage in time, or if Bharati had asked him to be one. The headmaster of Grateful to Life and Death cannot perhaps decide to which āshrama he belongs! An unhappy result is a curious mixture of all the four āshramas. Whatever may be the case, one thing is certain about all these so-called sanyāsis: they are all fake ones, circumstantial sanyāsis.

Coming back to Chandran and his Albert Mission College, we are really not interested in whether a particular character observes a particular rule of such a life as laid down in the shāstras. In fact,

this question does not arise. After all, Albert College is not run by shāstras but by Principal Brown, and Chandran is living in the twentieth century, not the twelfth. Still, we are interested in knowing to what extent does this system of education with which Malgudi, like the rest of the country, is blessed influence the pattern of life which remains almost the same as it was in the twelfth century A.D. or even B.C. (for it matters little).

It is a well-recognized fact that the system of education of a society exerts tremendous influence on its life and general outlook. Education is a significant and powerful social instrument which can be put to any use. If handled properly, it can train the individual to play his role in society successfully; it can equally be made a tool of vicious propoganda. It can also create an attitude of revolt against traditions and age-old customs. This is exactly what it has tried to do in India.

The system of education which is prevalent in Malgudi has a long and interesting history of its own. It is the history of the predominance of one set of values over another. It has not evolved out of the roots; it has been transplanted from an alien soil. The result has been a curious hybrid species which is neither Eastern nor Western. It has not changed itself with the changing needs of the time. Its primary aim, when it was first imported, was to train a

number of bābus (clerks) so that they might help a handful of Englishmen to rule this country of vast dimensions. The fact remains a fact from whatever angle it is seen (except, of course, the angle of the then His Majesty Government). When Lord Macaulay made the following remark in the conclusion of his famous Minute of February 26, 1835, he did not realise that he was making history:

I think it is clear that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law nor as the languages of religion have the Sanskrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars; and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.... The languages of Western Europe civilized Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the Hindu what they have done for the Tartar.³⁶

It reflects more than anything else Macaulay's deliberate ignorance of the rich heritage of the past of India. Yes, the system of education which he championed has "civilized" the "natives." It has brought the West to the very heart of the country. It has given a serious blow to the overriding distinctions of caste which enabled certain castes to maintain their supremacy at the expense of others.

However, all has not been for the best. This system of education

³⁶Quoted from Ramsay Muir, Making of British India (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1923), p. 301.

was limited to only a small class of people. In its efforts to wipe out the distinctions of caste, it itself has created another "caste"--the "caste" of the educated class. The masses of people who live in villages have been left alone. Thus, a big vacuum has been created between this new "caste" and the "teeming millions." What Cunningham said in Modern India and the West is significant:

A century has passed since the inception of the policy of educating India on Western lines. Ninety per cent of the people are still illiterate and the national economy is not sufficiently advanced to provide suitable employment for more than a fraction of the educated minority. Progress has been hampered, and is still hampered, by the use of a foreign language for all the purposes of higher education. The authority of religion has been weakened and with it the social order which it sanctioned. Our education has ignored religion and brought nothing of equal validity to take its place.³⁷

And again,

It is unfortunate that the advance of education, so inspired, should have outpaced the social and economic development of the country.³⁸

What Gandhi said in a speech delivered at the Royal Institute of International affairs in London on October 20, 1931, is still true: "The British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking

³⁷Modern India and the West, ed. L.S.S. O'Malley (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 178-179.

³⁸Ibid., p. 182. Cunningham was in the Indian Educational Service for several decades. He was Director of Public Instruction in Assam for some time. His analysis of the situation is fairly reliable.

hold of things as they were, began to root them out."³⁹ Whatever might have been the causes, the fact stands that the system of education, which Narayan presents in his novels, is hardly adequate for providing the training that his people need. Chandran, baffled, confused, unable to decide what to do with his degree of Bachelor of Arts, is the typical product of such a system. When Krishna (Grateful to Life and Death) says, "This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage,"⁴⁰ he is not very much overstating the situation.

"Knowledge," says Radhakrishnan, "is not something to be packed away in some corner of our brain, but what enters into our being, colours our emotion, haunts our soul, and is as close to us as life itself. It is the over-mastering power which through the intellect moulds the whole personality, trains the emotions and disciplines the will."⁴¹ It leaves us wondering how far away is the system of education which Narayan criticizes from such a concept of knowledge.

³⁹Quoted from Sir Phillip Hartog, Some Aspects of Indian Education, Past and Present, University of London Institute of Education, Studies and Reports, VII, 1939, p. 69.

⁴⁰Grateful to Life and Death, p. 205.

⁴¹Indian Philosophy, I, 431.

The next significant social institution is that of marriage.

Among Hindus marriage is generally considered to be obligatory for every person. It is like a social and religious duty. This idea was well established even in the Vedic age. Several passages in the Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa show that an unmarried person is from the religious point of view considered to be incomplete and is not fully eligible to participate in religious ceremonies. In the Ramayana it is said that when Ram Chandra was performing the ashva-megha yagya, he had to get an image of Sita (who was at that time living in a jungle in an exiled state) put by his side so that his offerings to God could be accepted. The modern practice of keeping a betel nut by one's side in the absence of one's wife points to the same belief.⁴² Moreover, it is believed that one cannot achieve moksha after his death unless oblations are offered to the gods and the ancestors by his son. Thus, this belief also has helped in making the institution of marriage not only a social necessity but a spiritual also. The individual aspect

⁴²A. S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, p. 31. See also p. 33, where Altekar quotes a story from the Mahabharata to illustrate how by that time marriages had become obligatory, particularly for girls: "Subhru was the daughter of sage Kuni. Her father wanted to give her in marriage, but she would not consent. She remained unmarried for all her life, practising severe penance. At the time of her death, however, she learnt to her great surprise that she could not go to heaven because her body was not consecrated by the sacrament of marriage. With great difficulty she then induced sage Shringavat to marry her, stayed with him for one night and was then enabled to go to heaven."

is as much emphasized as the social one. Writing about the Hindu ideal of marriage, Radhakrishnan says:

The Hindu ideal emphasizes the individual and the social aspects of the institution of marriage. Man is not a tyrant nor is a woman a slave, but both are servants of a higher ideal to which their individual inclinations are to be subordinated. Sensual love is sublimated into self-forgetful devotion. Marriage for the Hindu is a problem and not a datum.⁴³

One wonders how Narayan makes his Malgudi people face this "problem." One thing which strikes us most is the fact that the age-old customs which originated in the obscure past and which today have lost much of their original significance still hold undisputed authority. These are adhered to rigidly, because the slightest negligence or indifference may prove, it is believed, disastrous to the family and the married couple. While Narayan's general outlook toward the Hindu ideals is that of approval, he is certainly critical of the practices and customs which create nothing but endless difficulties for both the parties, particularly the parents of the girl. It is true that Narayan does not advocate any outright revolution, but he does feel a genuine need for a more sensible approach to those practices which really do not mean much in the changed social and economic situations.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 84-85.

Smritis and the epics recognized eight forms of marriage.⁴⁴

Some of these were socially unapproved, while others were commended. The form of marriage which we come across in the Malgudi novels--the brāhma vivāha--is the one which has been for long the most popular and sacred form. It is the traditional Hindu marriage, universally approved and practised at least by the upper caste Hindus. It is arranged by the parents of the boy and the girl. When Balu reaches marriageable age, it is Margayya and not Balu who starts negotiations for a suitable bride. Chandran certainly takes a very unconventional step first by falling in love with a girl and then by asking his parents to arrange his marriage with her.

The selection of a suitable bride or bridegroom is determined by various considerations, some of which like caste and gotra have

⁴⁴These eight forms are:

1. Paishācha vivāha--Force and fraud was used by the bridegroom to make the woman yield to his passion. It was the most condemned form of marriage.

2. Rākshasa vivāha--According to this form of marriage woman was regarded as prize of war. The victor carried away the bride and married her.

3. Āsura vivāha--The bridegroom paid a price for his bride.

4. Gāndharva vivāha--It meant a love marriage.

The first three forms of marriage were highly condemned, while opinion was divided about the fourth one.

5. Arsha vivāha--In this marriage the father of the bride was permitted to accept a cow and a bull from his would-be son-in-law. The father had to use this cow's milk for performing sacrifices.

6. Dāvā vivāha--In this form a daughter was offered in marriage to an officiating priest by the sacrificer.

7-8. Prājāpatya vivāha and Brāhma vivāha--there is very

religious sanctions. The factors of social status and economics (dowry) are equally important.

First of all, there is the consideration of caste. Marriage out of one's caste is not permitted. Even within the same caste there are further restrictions of sub-castes. In The Bachelor of Arts Chandran does not have to worry too much over this problem, since the girl he wants to marry belongs to the same sub-caste as he does:

The suffix to the name of the girl's father was a comforting indication that he was of the same caste and sub-caste as Chandran. Chandran shuddered at the thought of all the complications that he would have had to face if the gentleman had been Krishna Iyengar, or Krishna Rao, or Krishna Mudaliar. His father would certainly cast him off if he tried to marry out of caste.⁴⁵

In the Malgudi novels nobody is thrown out of his caste, since they all have married according to the caste rules. The case of Sriram and Bharati is doubtful, since we do not know with a certainty to which castes they belong. It is very possible that they are not of the same caste. Of course, in their case it does not matter much.

little difference between these two forms. The father carefully selects the son-in-law, invites him to his house, and offers him his daughter according to proper religious rites, along with presents which he likes to give.

⁴⁵The Bachelor of Arts, p. 67.

Next comes the problem of horoscopes.⁴⁶ It is the first step in the negotiations of marriage since the question of caste is pre-supposed. The horoscope of the boy and the girl are exchanged and then studied by the astrologers of the two sides to their best satisfaction. They are supposed to match perfectly, and the governing stars (nakshatras) of the boy and the girl should be in the right houses (otherwise there is every danger of a terrible warfare between the heavenly bodies over the question of dominance). The matching of horoscopes is usually not a very big problem, since the nakshatras can be set right by an extra fee to the astrologer! Margayya resorts to it when his astrologer concludes that the seventh and the ninth houses in his son's horoscope are not sound. At once, Dr. Pal, Margayya's friend, finds out a different astrologer who can rearrange the stars of Balu to suit the circumstances. However, the fee charged is seventy-five rupees instead of being just five. It reflects how some of the strict regulations of the past have been farcically reduced to nothing but a matter of convenience. Of course, there are still people like Malathi's father who strongly believes in the inauspicious results

⁴⁶Altekar thinks that the practice of consulting horoscopes did not exist till 400 A.D. By 900 A.D. it became an established practice, and it played an important part in making and breaking of matches.

of ill-matched horoscopes. That is the reason why he does not agree to the marriage proposal sent by Chandran's people.

The material aspect in the negotiation of marriage is not less important. There is the over-riding question of social status. Chandran's mother does not like the idea of her son's marrying the daughter of a head clerk. With the question of status and social prestige is coupled the inevitable question of dowry. Here is Margayya relating to his clients the effects of this system on his family:

Three daughters were born to my father. Five cart-loads of paddy came to us every half year, from the fields. We just heaped them on the floor of the hall, we had five halls to our house; but where has it all gone? To the three daughters. By the time my father found husbands for them there was nothing left for us to eat at home.⁴⁷

But when it comes to the question of Balu's marriage, Margayya is decided that his son should marry a girl who is not only beautiful but can bring a big fat dowry, too.

Chandran, like most other young men, is very much against such a system. He feels that demanding a cash dowry amounts to extortion, but he can hardly do anything about it. His mother is very much annoyed with him over this point. She says:

My father gave seven thousand in cash to your father, and over two thousand in silver vessels, and spent nearly five thousand on wedding celebrations. What was wrong in it? How are we any the worse for it? It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law.

⁴⁷The Financial Expert. pp. 6-7.

We can't disregard the custom.⁴⁸

If she had five daughters, she certainly would not have said the same thing. Now that she has two sons--and this means two big dowries are going to come into her house--she can justify the system of dowry.⁴⁹

Here is the difference between the attitudes of the two generations, the generation of Chandran and that of his mother. The mother still feels strongly attached to old customs. For example, she cannot even think of the idea of sending a proposal to the bride's people first. According to the time-honored practice, it has to come from the other side, and she is not prepared to be the laughing-stock of the community for doing anything contrary to this. In fact, she feels so strongly about this that she says, "I shall drown myself in Sarayu

⁴⁸The Bachelor of Arts, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁹This system is connected with the conception of marriage as a dāna or gift. The very word kanyā-dāna, i.e., giving away of a daughter, which forms a part of the major ceremony of marriage, points to the same thing. Customarily, a religious gift has to be accompanied by a gift of gold or cash. So kanyā-dāna was also accompanied by a gift in cash or ornaments. For a long time this gift had been very nominal. The case of the Rajput royalty was different; in ordinary families it was never a problem. However, the situation has completely changed during the last sixty or seventy years. It has assumed vast proportions and is definitely one of the worst evils of the present Hindu marriage system.

before I allow any proposal to go from this side."⁵⁰

It brings us back to the question of traditions and what happens when they get separated from the stream of life. A living tradition fills a genuine need of every society. It "influences our inner faculties, humanises our nature, and lifts us to a higher level. By means of it, every generation is moulded in a particular cast which gives individuality and interest to every culture type."⁵¹ But when it keeps its window shut and does not let any fresh air blow in, it starts losing its vitality. It becomes stagnant; instead of working like a guide it thwarts the growth of the individual and through him the growth of the society in which it exists. It is probably what has happened in the case of several of those customs which Chandran's mother cannot disregard.

Narayan's attitude toward the traditional institutions and customs is that of trust tempered by criticism. He trusts them because the systems which have been working well for thousands of years might still have some good in them; he criticizes them, though silently, because what was good for the past may very likely not suit the needs of the present. He rarely condemns the orthodox viewpoint. He shows a spirit of tolerance even for such ideas as Chandran's mother propagates.

⁵⁰The Bachelor of Arts, p. 73.

⁵¹The Hindu View of Life, p. 18.

What is still more significant is the fact that he welcomes at the same time the slow change that the younger generation is bringing with it. Narayan does not seem to be approving of the too-strong winds uprooting the very plant itself.

Such an attitude on Narayan's part is fairly conspicuous in his portrayal of family and personal relationships. On one hand, he shows the solidarity of the family as a social unit, the ideal of spiritual continuity, and the idea of kuladharmā⁵² and kulapramparā⁵³ as the bases which sustain the life of the individual; on the other, he shows the break-up of old institutions such as the joint family system.

The joint family system is a system in which "all the members of the family live together in the same abode. The family circle is not the narrow one consisting of parents and children.... It seems that normally the joint family included three generations, for the life-span of three generations is usually a hundred years; and it would be extremely rare that an individual may outlive a century."⁵⁴

⁵²It is very difficult to give exact English equivalents for these terms. The Sanskrit word kula means "family". This idea of family is different from what is commonly meant by family in the West. It is very broad; it includes the living members as well as all the ancestors. Dharma has been explained earlier. Kuladharmā means the religious and social duties of an individual toward his family.

⁵³Family traditions.

⁵⁴Prabhu, op. cit., p. 18.

It was inevitable that a change in economic conditions (for example, seeking a job away from one's home) should have shaken the structure of such a system. It would be wrong to assume that the joint family system has completely disappeared. It still forms the basis of the life of eighty per cent of people who live in villages.

Malgudi, being a small town, has neither completely broken from the older structure nor has it been completely modernized. A dividing wall between the two houses (which were originally one), one belonging to our Margayya and the other to his brother, reminds us that the joint family system is a phenomenon of a very recent past. Margayya still cherishes the memory of living together in the big house--"the first house of the street." In The Printer of Malgudi Srinivas, his brother, and their families, all used to live together before Srinivas moved into Malgudi to start his newspaper work.

In a society in which respect for elders is almost a religion, the way of life, the code of social relationships, duties and responsibilities, all are to a great extent influenced by such an attitude. Taya Zinkin comments:

Within the family itself, the individual's importance grows with age, for age is respected in India as success is in the United States. A man may be fifty years old and educated far beyond his elders, but he still treats them with all the respect due to age. He does not sit down or talk in front of them without being invited to do so, and under no circumstances does he smoke in front of them. This respect for age makes for contentment; it provides

everybody with a place within his own family. Thus, a government servant, holding the position of a permanent Under-Secretary of State, will kiss the feet of his village elders, if custom requires him to do so.⁵⁵

What Taya Zinkin says is basically right, but things are changing rapidly. One cannot ignore Rajus and Balus, for their number is not very small.

The upbringing of children is on the whole rather strict. Narayan does not seem to approve this strictness. In Swami and Friends this is the central issue. The discipline of the school and his father's earnest efforts at home to make him a scholar create a situation which young Swami cannot appreciate. The case of Balu (The Financial Expert) is just the opposite. He had been a completely spoiled child and his growth into an irresponsible, almost an abnormal young man is along the expected lines. The relationship of the father and the son makes an interesting study. Margayya's ambitions about Balu's passing the high school examination remain unfulfilled. There is something pathetic in Margayya's dreams about his son's future. Nevertheless, it does not make him less responsible for what he has made of the boy. There is not much difference between the Balu of Part One who asks his father every day to bring a little elephant and the Balu of Part Five who has grown up to be a young father himself--Balu whom Dr. Pal can

⁵⁵India Changes! pp. 13-14.

easily use against Margayya. Only the latter Balu thinks that he is no more a child. Something has gone wrong somewhere. Margayya realises it very late. Balu does not seem to possess the capacity of even realising it.

Sriram's upbringing could not have been better. Deprived of love and the care of his parents whom he has never seen except in a photograph, he grows up to be extremely lonely, reserved, and bashful. The old grandmother can give him everything--love, money, care--but not the security of a father and a mother. Sriram's deep attachment to Bharati is perhaps just a reaction to his early life.

In a study of personal relationships the in-law relations need special mention. These are obviously very delicate and are often guided more by such considerations as public opinion and family prestige than by genuine feelings of love and attachment. They present a great deal of complication, particularly in a joint family. Little maladjustments eventually may lead to the break-up of the joint nature of the family. In Grateful to Life and Death there are Krishna's mother and her elder daughter-in-law who cannot get along very well. Their problem is temporarily solved by the son and the daughter-in-law moving to another city. But it does not keep Krishna's mother from declaring (only when her elder son is not present), "Whatever happens, even with a ten thousand rupee dowry, I shall never accept a girl from a High Court

judge's family again...."⁵⁶ The shaft is aimed at the daughter-in-law, who is the daughter of a retired High Court judge.

A significant aspect of Malgudi life which has yet to be considered is its religion. One thing which strikes the readers most is the absence of any dogma or assertion of one religion's superiority over other faiths and beliefs. It is very comprehensive. It does not insist so much on religious conformity as on ethical outlook on life. It is conduct and not creed that matters. There is a Sanskrit shloka which says, "na hi kalyānakrt kascit durgatim tāta gacchati,"⁵⁷ which means that the performer of the good--and not the believer in this or that view--can never get into an evil state.

"Religion" in the Hindu sense of the word has a very extended meaning and includes the whole moral universe. It is dharma. The word dharma is formed from the Sanskrit root dhr, which means to hold or to sustain. Dharma holds a thing and maintains it in being. Particular creeds or faiths are known as sampradāya. Mechanical beliefs do not mean much in the Hindu scheme of morality. Dharma is reflected in the everyday conduct of the individual.

⁵⁶Grateful to Life and Death, p. 30.

⁵⁷The Bhagavad Gita, translated and interpreted by Franklin Edgerton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), Part I, p. 68.

Since dharma is not a fixed formula, each person may evolve his own dharma. Margayya's dharma is different from that of Krishna. Margayya recognises one fact above all, and that is money. The central point of his "philosophy" is that money alone is important in this world. He propitiates the goddess Lakshmi so that more and more money may pour in. For him Lakshmi is the highest deity; she is the Absolute, the Ultimate. Margayya has, however, very good business sense. Balu has to acquire learning; so why waste time over worshipping the wrong type of goddess? No, Balu has to please the goddess Sarasvati. Margayya has secured a small framed picture of this goddess, the goddess of learning and enlightenment sitting beside her peacock and playing on the strings of a veena. To Margayya's great disappointment his promising son is not interested in either of the goddesses. The goddess of enlightenment is extremely sparing in blessing Balu with any enlightenment.

Krishna, on the other hand, does not worship any goddess. But still he is as good a Hindu as Margayya is or as the priest of the temple that Margayya goes to is. Perhaps he is even better than these two. Chandran's mother, who worships her gods and turns the prayer beads regularly (though when she is doing so, part of her mind busies itself with the thoughts of her husband, home, children, and relatives), and Ravi's mother, who believes strongly that Ravi can be cured by a

particular kind of pujā--all fit into the pattern of Hinduism. The difference is only of gradation. "The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God; then come the worshippers of the incarnations like Rama, Krishna, Buddha; below them are those who worship ancestors, deities and sages, and the lowest of all are the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits."⁵⁸

In the Malgudi novels we do not have very many worshippers of the Absolute. In order to worship it one needs jñān of the nature of the self and of the Ultimate reality, and this is not easy. The people of Malgudi worship incarnations, deities, ancestral gods, and even spirits. "The man of action finds his God in fire, the man of feeling in the heart, and the feeble-minded in the idol, but the strong in spirit find God everywhere."⁵⁹ But one thing which is significant is their tolerance for each other. Srinivas neither believes nor approves of the way Ravi's people are trying to cure his madness, but he tolerates it even when the whole strange proceeding is being conducted in his very house. When Ravi's mother asks for permission to take Ravi to the temple at Salim where, she thinks, he will be all right if kept for

⁵⁸Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, p. 32.

⁵⁹Loc. cit.

a week at the portals of the temple, he says with apparent conviction:
 "By all means. He is bound to get well again. Even madness passes.
 Only existence asserts itself."⁶⁰

Existence--the law of being--asserts itself in various forms and shapes. It asserts itself in Shiva (the destroyer God) as well as in Vishnu (the preserver, the sustainer). The follower of Shiva may temporarily think that it is only his God who is supreme, but sooner or later, the realization is bound to come that Shiva and Vishnu are only two manifestations of the same spirit.⁶¹ The following story, which is very often told in India, may be mentioned here in this connection:

Once there was a man who worshipped only Vishnu. He did not think much of anyone who worshipped Shiva or any other God. However, one day when he was prostrating himself before Vishnu, he thought ill of the worshippers of the other God Shiva. When he opened his eyes and looked at the image of Vishnu, he saw the face of the image divided into two parts. On one part appeared God Vishnu and on the other God Shiva. The two appeared as one face and told him that Vishnu and Shiva are one.

There can be nothing better than this example of religious tolerance. Even Margayya, the devotee of Lakshmi, has to say at one point, "It is all the same Goddess. There is no difference between

⁶⁰The Printer of Malgudi, p. 262.

⁶¹See Radakrishnan, The Principal Upanigads, p. 144.

Lakshmi and Saraswati."⁶² But complete toleration is often easier in principle than in practice. In Margayya's case, this noble statement is not translated into practice. It is a good piece of advice to his son. However, we know he himself very much believes in the pronounced difference between the two. Lakshmi is for him who has recognized the real value of money. His son should propitiate the other Goddess. It is a confusing scheme of worship--a kind of departmentalizing of heavenly powers!

What Webb wrote in Science, Religion and Reality about Hinduism is important for understanding the complexity of forms that we find in Malgudi:

With its traditions of periodically repeated incarnations of the deity in the most diverse forms, its ready acceptance of any and every local divinity or founder of a sect or ascetic devotee as a manifestation of God, its tolerance of symbols and legends of all kinds, however repulsive or obscene by the side of the most exalted flights of world-renouncing mysticism, it could perhaps more easily than any other faith develop, without loss of continuity with its past, into a universal religion which could see in every creed a form suited to some particular group or individual, of the universal aspiration after one Eternal Reality, to whose true being the infinitely various shapes in which it reveals itself to or conceals itself from one are alike indifferent.⁶³

⁶²The Financial Expert, p. 113.

⁶³Science, Religion and Reality, ed. Joseph Needham (London: The Sheldon Press, 1925), pp. 334-35.

The influence of this religion on ethics and morals is regularized or channelized in the form of sanctions which it gives to social behavior, practices, relationships and responsibilities. A halo of sanctify is put around these sanctions. Thus, they gain power and permanence and give to people the rules of life which they readily accept as valid.

On the whole Narayan's attitude toward religion is that of trust; but he is critical of the unhealthy tendencies, especially superstitious practices which the popular religion has accumulated to itself. Sometimes instead of criticizing, he laughs at these absurdities. His pictures of the priests and the astrologers are tempered with gentle satire. The impact of the West is reflected in characters like Krishna and Chandran who without being agnostic or atheist can question some of the traditional values and try to rationalize them in their own way.

Narayan's attitude of tolerance extends to the field of politics also. One may find incidental references to political events and movements in his novels, but he does not try to make an ideological system out of them. He remains, above all, an artist. His main interest lies in the even tenor of the life of the small town. It gives the impression of an old sleepy town. However, it does not entirely escape the impress of the big political events which almost shake

the rest of the country. The influence is slow but obvious.

In Swami and Friends Narayan devotes one full chapter to political activities, the Swadeshi movement, and the locally organized protest meeting in which young Swami plays not a very insignificant role (of breaking window-panes of his school). He hardly understands what it is all about. For boys like him it is great fun. The only sad thing about it is that Swami gets caught and is appropriately rewarded for his enthusiasm by an immediate dismissal.

In Waiting for the Mahatma the tone is slightly different and the colors are a bit heavier. Malgudi with the rest of the country is passing through a very crucial period of its history. Mahatma Gandhi has shown it a way of fighting a battle of non-violence. The book gives warm and authentic picture of the life of Gandhi's āshram . Narayan's attitude is not that of a newspaper observer but of one who shares the concern and feels and sympathizes with those who have suffered.

In a discussion of an author's attitudes, there remains a final consideration, one of admittedly less importance than that which comes directly from his writings, and yet one which has its own emphatic significance . To make use of it is like estimating the same objective from another vantage point, a vantage point which is farther away: the details become vague, but the over-all situation is more apparent. This

is a consideration of the novelist's own statements about his intentions.

Narayan is singularly reticent in this respect. His is the attitude of an artist who prefers to keep silent and lets his books explain themselves.

In a study of a novelist's development the question of the beginning of his writing career is very important. The story of the early impressionable years when the writer is struggling for form, expression and coherence has usually more than just biographical value. It is true that we do not know much about Narayan's early years, but we know that his interest in writing was aroused when he was about twenty.⁶⁴ How he was encouraged and who encouraged or inspired him are questions which one would very much like to know, but in view of the novelist's reluctance to answer these there is no other way but to leave them as they are. It may be of some interest to make mention of Narayan's association with Graham Greene. In Narayan's own words, "He is not only the finest writer but the finest and most perfect friend that a man can have in this world."⁶⁵

⁶⁴Personal letter from the author dated December 16, 1959. The statements by Narayan that are quoted in the rest of this chapter are all quoted from this letter.

⁶⁵Quoted from Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement, eds. Stanley J. Kunitz and Vineta Colby (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1955), pp. 704-705.

Narayan's first novel, Swami and Friends appeared when he was twenty-eight. The period from 1927 to 1935 was one of apprenticeship when young Narayan was sharpening his tools--a keen observation and a skill for drawing life-like characters placed in a setting vibrating with life. It is a period which saw the rise of Narayan as a short story writer. After publishing Swami and Friends Narayan devoted himself to the writing of novels. But the emergence of the novelist in him did not mean the end of short story writing career. Even today, he is as much a novelist as a short-story writer. He has written literally hundreds of stories, and most of these have appeared in the Weekly edition of The Hindu of Madras. He has brought several collections of these stories and he has plans for bringing out some more.⁶⁶ Those who have read his stories like "An Astrologer's Day", "Iswaran", or "The Roman Image" would surely welcome this "plan". It is hoped that with more of his stories before the readers, a fair estimate of his genuine ability as a short story writer would be possible.

In studying Narayan's novels (as well as short stories) the reader is aware that one constituent which dominates all others is Malgudi--the scene of all his novels and several of his short stories. It is the Malgudi of Krishna and Chandran, Raju and Sampath, Srinivas

⁶⁶Personal letter; see footnote 64.

and Sriram, real and breathing, Malgudi which Narayan has described with such vivid exactness that one could go into it and never be lost. On the railway platform one could see Raju's stall (which, however, has been taken over by another contractor--vide The Guide). On the turning of the Railway Road one could hear Gaffur, the taxi driver, bargaining with his customers. The streets and sights do not need an introduction. From the Market Road to the New Extension, everything seems to be very familiar. On the Market Road one could perhaps still see Dr. Pal's signboard--"Sociologist, Journalist and Writer." A little farther there is the Anand Bhawan Restaurant, where Srinivas and Sampath had once met. There is rarely any greatly detailed description of Malgudi, but we know how it looks.

A question such as how the idea of creating a fictional town came to the author's mind is inevitable. It could have been a sudden discovery. Or Narayan might have had some writer with a similar fictional town--say, Trollope--in mind. Or if Malgudi came completely from his own imagination, he might have been thinking it over for a long time. On a question like this, one could go on speculating endlessly. Narayan's own words, "Malgudi created itself,"⁶⁷ do not help us much.

Another very interesting question is that of the author's taste. One wonders who are Narayan's favorite authors. When recently

⁶⁷ Cf. footnote 64, above.

Hemingway was asked the same question by an interviewer for The Paris Review, he gave names which would fill a page, names which cover four centuries of literary and artistic efforts in Europe, England, and America. When Narayan was asked a similar question, he politely and economically replied, "I have no answer."⁶⁸

On another question which is very much related to the above--the question of possible influences on his writing career--he again replied, "None."⁶⁹ This monosyllable is enough of a signal to the critics to spare him and his art from a critical dissection. However, it still leaves us wondering whether Narayan's novels are really "influence-less" and "inspiration-less"; or whether he is just over-simplifying the issue and is trying to say, "Just read my novels. It is the finished product, not the method, that counts."

The reply to another question, which is about the possible influence of any particular event or events of the author's life on his writing, is of the same nature. Narayan apparently fears over-explicit remarks and resorts to such almost meaningless generalizations as "I have no faith in influences." It is really hard to understand how an author can totally eliminate such influences. A work of fiction is not

⁶⁸See footnote 64.

⁶⁹See footnote 64.

the diary of an author: nobody will dispute that fact. The author does possess imaginative freedom, freedom to handle his material any way he likes. This freedom, however, is checked by certain restraints. He does not build structures in the air. At the back of it lies the solid experience of life--people he has met, situations he has seen, and the impressions that he has gathered unawares. Even if he has no faith in them, they do not cease to exist. The very fact that Narayan says that, "The English Teacher is autobiographical in some parts"⁷⁰ implies an influence and a most emphatic faith in that influence. However, one does have sympathy with Narayan's point of view, particularly in the light of some of the contemporary critical studies connected with the field of literary influences and how these are often overdone.

The reply to the question, "Could you please throw some light on your method of writing?" was an emphatic "No, it being a subconscious process." This statement means much more than the author perhaps intended. Or perhaps it does not mean anything. All creative writing, to some degree, is a "subconscious process". It is entirely different from elaborating a mechanical principle. But each writer has perhaps his own way of writing. Henry James's Notebooks, with his sometimes elaborate, sometimes sketchy plans of plot, structure and

⁷⁰see footnote 64, above.

characterization, would suggest that it is not just the "subconscious process". A good deal of planning is needed before the characters can move on the pages of the novel. A subject may occupy the mind of an author for a number of years, or he may make considerable change in his original plan. The development of the idea and how it is given "form" have their own significance.

It is not very uncommon to find writers with a definite liking for some of their characters or books, or even a prejudice against them. In Pendennis Thackeray likes Helen Pendennis and makes no secret of his liking. If somebody had asked him, "Whom do you like most in your novels?" it certainly could not have been Becky Sharp. Henry James preferred The Ambassadors to, say, The Bostonian or Washington Square. He did not include the latter in the collected edition of his novels and tales which he later brought out.

Narayan finds it "impossible to answer"⁷¹ such questions. Perhaps he wants to be fair to all of his characters and does not want to make us prejudiced. His polite but sharp answers indicate that he wants to put emphasis on his books rather than "explain" them.

Narayan's reputation in England has been an established fact for quite a long time. In the 1950's the Michigan State University

⁷¹See footnote 64, above.

Press by bringing out an American edition of most of his already published novels has introduced him to the American reading public. The Viking Press's publication of The Guide in 1958 and Narayan's present work on two more books for the same concern strongly suggest that he is building up a reading public in this country, too.

In India, like many other distinguished contemporary Indian writers, Narayan has been completely neglected. The following incident which John Haverstick quotes in his review reveals the extent of this neglect:

Traveling there a few years ago, an American journalist, preparing for an interview with Mr. Narayan, stopped in at one of the largest English-language bookstores in Bangalore, a city of 750,000 people which lies about sixty miles from Mr. Narayan's home in Mysore. "All sold out?" asked the journalist, finding no works by Narayan. No, the manager explained, they simply did not stock his books. "But Mr. Narayan is one of India's own novelists," said the journalist. "He lives nearby in Mysore city. You display all these new British and American novels. Why not his new one?" "Yes," replied the manager indifferently, "I know. But we do not read much fiction here in India." ⁷²

There are many factors responsible for this apparent neglect by the Indian reading public. The first and the foremost is the poor economy of the country; people are too poor to afford the luxury of books. This factor, however, affects all Indian literatures in equal measure. The neglect of the Indo-Anglian literature cannot be

⁷²"The Tragi-Comic Indians", Saturday Review, Jan. 14, 1956. p. 11.

explained simply by the poor purchasing power of the people; there is something more to it. The story of this indifference and apathy to the Indo-Anglian writers is directly related to the political history of the country. The attitude of suspicion and antagonism toward those who sought self-expression in the language of the rulers was the logical outcome of such a situation and hence, quite understandable. It may be mentioned here that during the last ten years with the change in the political set-up, a noticeable difference in the attitude of the Indian reading public toward the Indo-Anglian writers is seen. But still there is need for further improvement.

The neglect at home is fairly compensated for by the laurels he has recently won in Europe. His books, especially the last four, have been translated into most of the European languages. It is encouraging that his talent is now being widely recognised.

The world of Malgudi is intimate, warm, lifelike, and engaging. The small town of Malgudi, which serves as the locale of this world of Margayyas and Sampaths, is shabby, old, and unassuming; its streets are dark and dingy, its buildings unimpressive. Yet, this is real--real as a town like Malgudi can be. The setting is modern, and the life portrayed is contemporary. Still, there is an old-time air about

it. The wheels of time have either not moved at all or have moved at an extremely slow pace.

In the foreground of this familiar and unassuming setting--Lawley Extension and Anderson Lane, Albert Mission College and Kabir Lane, Sarayu Street and Market Road--there appear a few familiar faces, some of whom we know intimately; there are still others with whom we have formed just casual acquaintance. There is Srinivas busy in writing the editorial for his weekly, The Banner. A few steps down the office of the editor we are greeted by the printer himself in some warm and effusive words. Away from the groans of the treadles of the Truth Printing Works, under the shade of the big banyan tree, and on the granite slab of the old and deserted temple we happen to see Raju in the pose of a sanyāsi. We see them, greet them, and laugh with them (as well as at them). Yet there is something deeper in this human comedy. The sympathy and compassion which the reader feels for the petty lives of these insignificant men help him in sharing a part of this tragi-comic world without completely identifying himself with a Srinivas or a Sampath. In a way the reader is involved in this scheming world, yet there remains that distance and detachment by which he can watch these people grow, act, and move. Margayya's "tragedy" is not the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark; there is something farcical in it. At the same time, it is different from the clownish acrobatics of a circus. His moves are

at least credible. He has a heart which can feel and a mind which can think and plan. His ambitions about his badly-spoiled son Balu, even in their absurdities, are very like him.

Narayan's people have strong ties with traditions. Marriages are arranged, horoscopes consulted, and pujās performed. The caste of the forefathers dominates all other considerations. But this is not the complete picture; there is another side to it. In the heart of this ramshackle town there stands the Albert Mission College headed by Principal Brown. A Chandran, its typical product, can neither whole-heartedly accept the traditional patterns nor boldly reject them. The result is an inconsequential mixture of old patterns and new ideas. The framework is almost intact; it is only the inner lines which are affected. It is in this context that Narayan studies his people.

Narayan's Swami and Friends, his first novel, and his latest, The Guide, are a quarter of a century apart from each other. The story of this long stretch of time is the story of the literary development of the novelist. The structure of his later novels is comparatively compact, the organization much improved, and the style more flexible. Narayan has matured; he has not changed. He still has that sure sense of life which transcends the mere physical structure and through which he has been able to portray the saga of Malgudi.

Narayan is no moralist; yet he has his moral values. His judg-

ments are implied rather than stated. He does no harm to the illusion of life he creates. Keen observation, sense of native humor, and delicate tinges of irony are his most serviceable tools.

At the end of this study, we, like Graham Greene, have come to have complete faith in the reality of Malgudi; and with him we wonder whom we are going to meet next in this town, so strongly implanted in our imaginations. We will not have to wait for another novel. We can go out, in Graham Greene's words, "into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure a stranger approaching, past the bank, the cinema, the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us we know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human existence."⁷³

This is the greatness of the Malgudi novels.

⁷³The Financial Expert, p. vi.

APPENDIX

A GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS

Agni. Fire.

Ahimsā. Nonviolence.

Appa. Father.

Ashram. Different stages of man's life; it also refers to a place where the holy men live.

Ashva-megh Yagya. Horse sacrifice performed by Hindu kings in ancient times after a great victory.

Āyu. The span of life.

Bābu. A title like Mr. or Esquire; also refers to a clerk.

Bhog. Enjoyment or suffering in life.

Brahmā. The Creator God.

Brahmachāryāshrama. According to Hindu ideals, a man is supposed to lead a life of brahmacharya (celibacy) for twenty-five years. It is the time of acquiring knowledge.

Brāhmin. The highest caste among Hindus.

Chamār. A cobbler. It refers to caste as well as to profession.

Chappātti. Wheat-flour pancake.

Darshan. "Darshan in practice is a form of happiness induced among Hindus by being in the presence of some great manifestation of their collective consciousness. It may be person, place or thing, and represent past, present or future, so long as it sets up the definite recognizable glow of suprapersonal happiness."

--Vincent Sheean

Desh. Country.

Devadāsī. Temple-dancing girls.

Dharma. It has different levels of meaning. On one level it simply means "duties"; on another, "that which sustains man's life."

Dhotī. Cloth worn around the body below the waist.

Gotra. Clan.

Grihasthāshrama. Life of a married man.

Guna. Qualities, inherent traits.

Guru. Teacher, spiritual guide.

Harijans. Low caste Hindus, untouchables.

Jāti. Caste in which a Hindu is born.

Jñān. Knowledge, wisdom.

Jutkās. Horse-drawn carriages.

Kāla. Time.

Kanyā-dāna. Giving away daughter in marriage; the main ceremony in Hindu marriage.

Karma. Destiny; the doctrine that one's actions continue to have their effects in another incarnation.

Karmādhyakṣaḥ. God; the heavenly power who sits on judgment.

Karmaphala. The fruits of one's deeds.

Khādi. Hand-spun cloth popularized by Mahatma Gandhi.

Kula. Family.

Kuladharma. That which one should do as the member of a family.

Kulācramparā. Family traditions.

Lāṭhī. A stick.

Mantaras. Holy hymns.

Māyā. Illusion. According to Hindu ideals, this worldly life is Māyā.

Moksha. Eternal salvation; that state when man is free from the bonds of birth and death.

Mukh. Mouth.

Mukti. Moksha.

Nakshatra. Planet. It is believed among Hindus that the position of the planets at the time of one's birth influences the entire course of his life.

Paramātma. God.

Parvatī. Wife of Shiva, the destroyer God.

Pujā. Worship.

Purāna. Hindu religious texts.

Pyol. Elevated and roofed veranda in front of a house.

Rāj. Rule, kingdom.

Sāmbhar. South Indian vegetable curry.

Sampradāya. Religious denominations.

Sanyāsi. One who has renounced worldly life.

Sanyāsāśrama. That part of man's life when one leads the life of a sanyāsi.

Sāree. Hindu woman's dress.

Satyagraha. Mahatma Gandhi's program of non-violence.

Shāstras. Sacred scriptures.

Shāstrākars. The persons who wrote shastras.

Shikār. Hunting.

Shloka. Sacred Hymns.

Shrama. Exertion.

Shudra. Low caste Hindus.

Surya Devatā. Sun-god.

Swāmi. A saint.

Thālī. A special kind of necklace worn by married women in South India.

Upanishads. Religious texts of Hindus.

Vanprasthāśrama. The time when a Hindu retires from worldly life and goes to forests.

Varana. Caste system.

Vedas. Religious texts of Hindus.

Vedānta. A system of Hindu philosophy based on the interpretations of the Vedas.

Yogi. A saint; one who is well-versed in all kinds of yogas.

Zamīdārs. Big landowners.

Zenāna. Female.

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